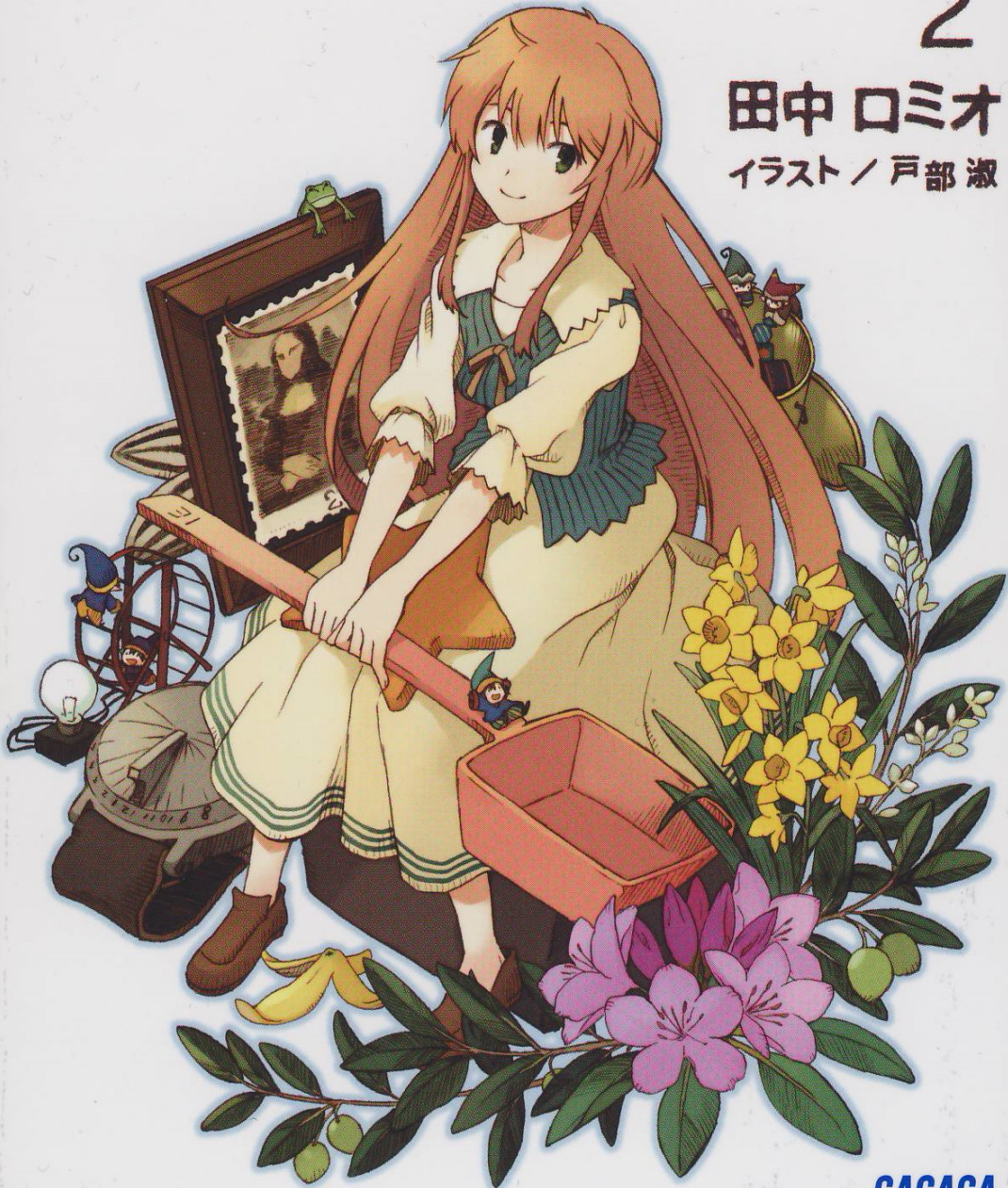


# 人類は衰退しました

## 2



田中 口ミオ  
イラスト／戸部 淑



**GAGAGA**



# 人類は衰退しました2

田中 ロミオ

イラスト／戸部 淑





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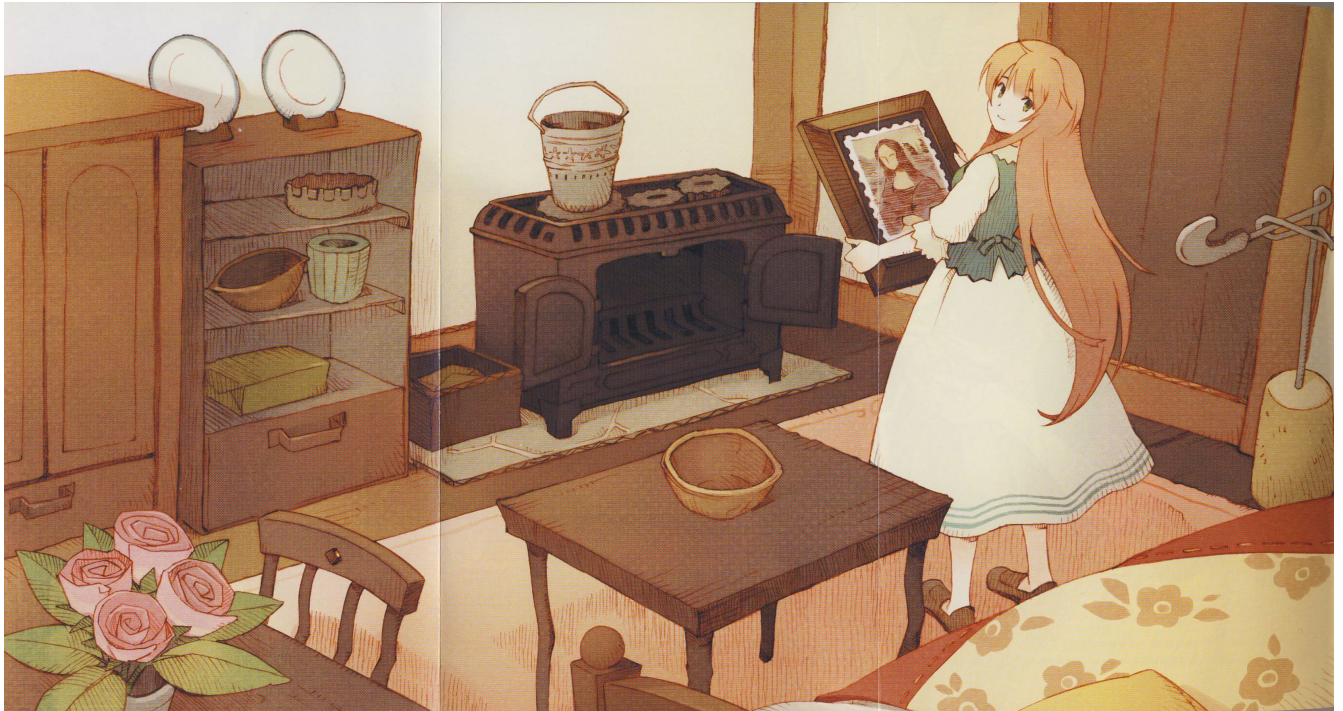
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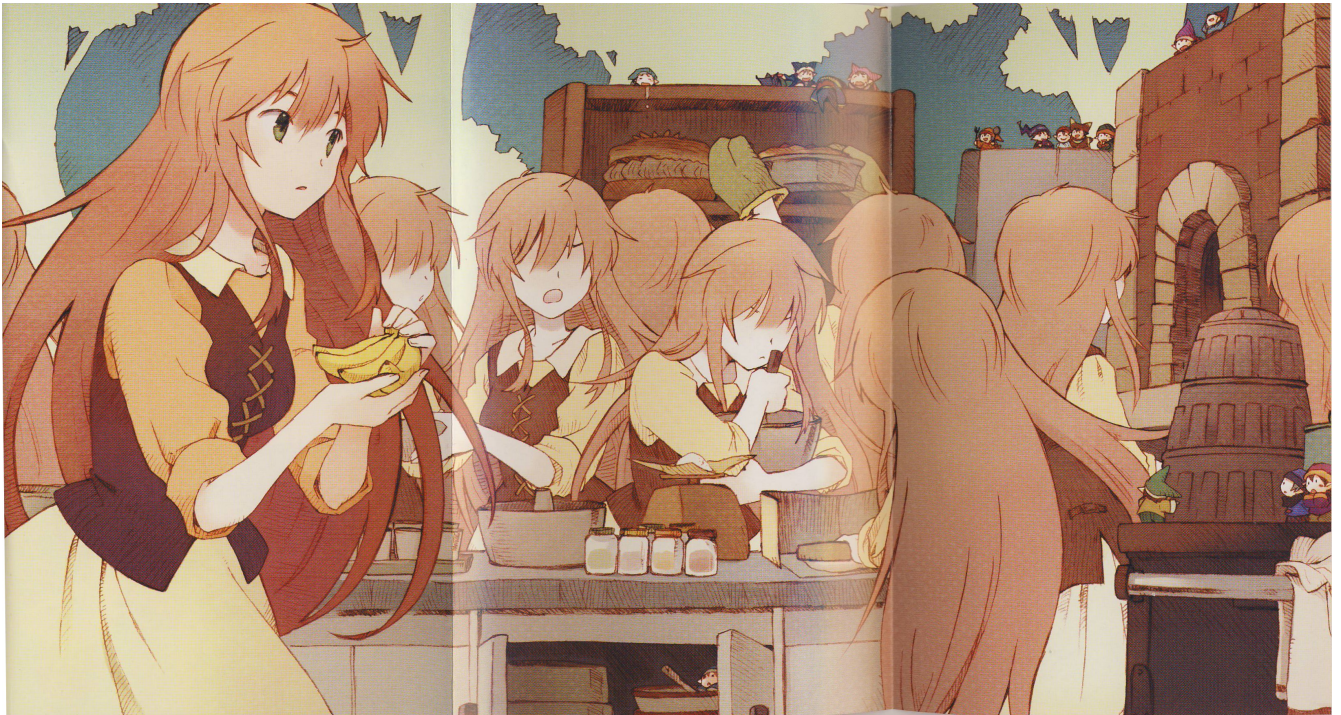
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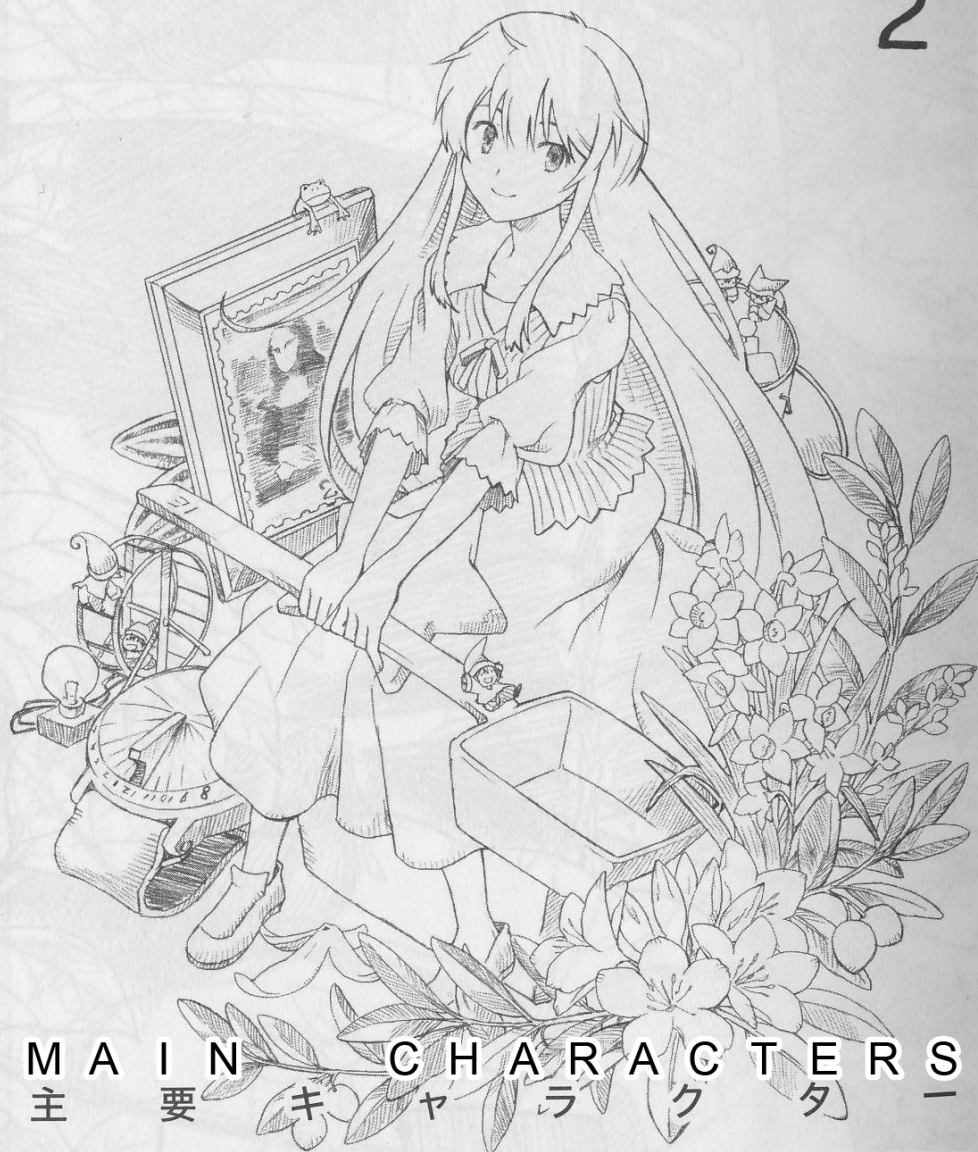






# 人類は衰退しました

## 2



### MAIN CHARACTERS

主 要 キ ャ ラ ク タ ー

**Protagonist (Watashi, "I")** Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. Fairies at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.

**Assistant** a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.



*From the back cover:*

### **Humanity Has Declined 2**

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. ...for what it was worth. Fairies had high intelligence, but everything concerning them was a mystery. They made incomprehensible and weird tools, and one turned my body small. Then they made me go pick up Grandfather's Assistant, who was returning to the workplace, many many times over. ...I cannot report something like that! What? I am one of the causes? Stimulation and tranquility both come to the tired brain of humanity...





The days in which I stayed up late at night continued.

Yesterday too I was lost in making models until three in the night, and it appeared certain that I would be late for work. Fortunately, my diligent application to this habit in this last month allowed me to wake up at the correct time despite only four hours of sleep. I changed my clothes in forty-five seconds, snatched my bag, rushed out of my room, stuck an apple in my pockets in the stead of breakfast, and left for the job with a stride...!

...and that was what I was going to do when I woke up. It was past noon.

"Eeek!"

Today I was certain I would wake up at seven and be at work by nine, returning home by evening and retiring to bed at midnight at the latest, but despite going for a standardization of that lifestyle cycle, it ended with an *I'll-do-better-tomorrow* again.

If I kept on with this lifestyle, I will end up as a nocturnal person.

"I would like to avoid that, at least..."

I lifted myself up, lifted up heavy eyelids, dragged a heavy body to work, and more or less engaged with work. Though in these days and times, I may have claimed that it was work, but they were actually empty, leisurely hours. Except just for today it had to be one consultation dropping in unexpectedly after another. "Really, your warehouse is being taken over by the fairies? What? This one spotted a fairy nest on top of a tree they cut down? The garden they were cultivating is full of fairies instead of vegetables? What kind of situation is this?" And so, as far as work, I did work. I was utterly exhausted when I came back home, where the smell of a warm stew embraced me.

I was about to have one mouthful when I woke up. It was two PM.

"Whaaaaaat?"

Most sorrowful... it had been a most sorrowful Return to Sleep!

Wanting of course to avoid the silliness of a second return to sleep, I immediately flew to standing. I checked the time again and it was, in fact, past fourteen. This was of course my first time oversleeping this far.

There was no trace of anyone in the house. The sole and only other occupant, Grandfather, had to have gone to the office a long time before. Even if there were no things to do, it was a tacit agreement that we would show up for work.

"Awww, what a mess, by Jove."

Going to work even late meant that my first job would be taking a sarcastic comment or two from Grandfather, who was going to be at the office already. Sigh.

And so, as nothing was going to change even if I hurried at this point, I decided to take my time in making myself ready.

As I brushed hair that I could not quite find time or reason to make shorter and had kept growing sooo very long, my gaze turned to the desktop.

"...heh heh heh."

I could not stop a laugh coming off me with a satisfied smile.

On the desk were neatly arranged miniature models of furniture.

Shelves made from a matchbox, a soup bowl from a split and emptied walnut, desk and chair made of twigs, on the bed mini-size sheets and pillow, a carpet made of cut-up blotting paper, a clothes drying rack made from a modified safety pin, a thimble with grips added to make it into a pot, and under it a stove made by meshing gears, this one quite the outstanding piece of work among these, as it was possible to actually light a fire in it.

Yes, the models I was making were of miniature furniture.

I first had the idea when I made a chair for the sole use of a fairy that had come to visit



around a week before.

With the things about home as reference, I tried replicating them as closely as possible, and the next time I wanted a desk, and the next time a cup... and the greed for things ran amok—"I am remaking my room, it is identical but in small form..."

On my desk laid a perfect diorama of my room. Only two of them, but still it also had wallboards. If surrounded on all four sides, next I will need to recreate the house itself, therefore I used two walls connected to form an angle.

"Ah, right, right, I forgot just one thing."

It was my latest work, completed just the previous night.

It was that famous painting, the Mona Lisa... at least a stamp of it, placed in a mini-mini frame and hung in the spot where there was actually a portrait in my room.

Although the portrait was of Grandmother when she was young, and there was therefore some discrepancy, I could of course not replicate the painting itself in miniature.

On this I would like to have some forbearance for the time being.

For what it meant to say that myself, everything was quite well executed.

I was skilled at fine work to begin with, which was why, back at The School which I frequented, I showed off said skill whenever there were decorations to make for parties.

Take for example this miniature chair.

It had the same shape as the one in which I was sitting, and utilizing the right perspective, it was not impossible to see that there were two of the exact same chair sitting side by side.

Come now, you know how it is. Put the large chair in the distance, put the miniature near... there you go.

"Ah, this part is not made that well..."

I inspected the detailing in translucency from the sunlight shining in from the window, then used the knife for minute work to correct the wrong part for a moment.

"And with this..."

I set down the chair and felt that the diorama was noticeably closer to being finished.

I really wish the fairies would hurry and use all this furniture...

Right then, I heard the sound of tableware shattering.

"...what?"

It came from the direction of the kitchen. When I went there to look, two dishes that were drying on their stand had fallen on the floor and had mercilessly shattered.

"Why...?"

The window was closed and there did not appear to be any wind blowing. As I stared at the kitchen counter, my gaze was cut across by a smallish carrot, rustling as it swayed.

As far as my knowledge went, carrots did not move on their own.

"Really now, hello?"

As far as beings that could cause this, I did have an inkling about *a certain species*.

"You fairies moving over there. Where are you going?"

The question was ignored and it just kept tap-tap-tapping as it ran.

I extended my hands and grasped the carrot. Two pairs of feet dangled down in the air.

"What are you going to do with a carrot anyway?"

I rotated the visible surface and met eyes with *what* was clinging in on the other side. It was two brown mice.

"EeEK, there are mice!"

The carrot, which had slipped out of my hand when I flipped it over, was sucked in by the back of the kitchen counter. The rustling sound of the carrot being dragged rushed away

somewhere.  
"...it got stolen."

It was fifteen when I arrived at the office.

"Only executives are allowed to arrive this late, I believe."

The person who told me the words that I expected was my Grandfather, who was also the boss of the Mediation Office here in Kusunoki Village, the Village of the Camphor Tree.

"I thought I would come before noon, however... we got mice."

"Mice?"

"They stole some vegetables."

Grandfather made a dubious face for a moment, but then his eyebrows twitched in understanding, and his eyes returned to the document near him.

"...again with those."

"Were there any before, as well?"

"They sneak in at times."

"I thought it was maybe the fairies."

"I don't think they'd steal human food."

That they would not.

"More importantly, look at this," and he lifted towards me what he had in his hand.

I thought it was a document, but it seemed to be a letter. I took it and skimmed it.

*"Odd things have been circulating in large quantity in the Village of late. We think it a fairy prank, but we want to ask, is there anything dangerous? We give you one of those things with this letter."*

"Well, this is rare. A letter from the people, I see."

"It was put next to the entrance 'round this morning. The thing that came with the letter was this."

Grandfather laid a pair of heavy boots on the desk.

"These are human sized, I see."

"Try wearing them."

The boots were slid noisily towards my side.

"...these boots cause things even we can't imagine."

Told to wear them, I was a little hesitant. I took one in hand and tried peeked inside, then turning it over and shaking it, but there was nothing strange. Seems the mechanism will remain a mystery until actually worn. After some perplexity, I went *e'yah!* and thrust my feet into the boots, then...

"Well, these seem to feel normal to wear...?"

"Try walking."

I walked around with a sliding sound in the boots of the wrong size.

The abnormality occurred quickly.

"Well now?"

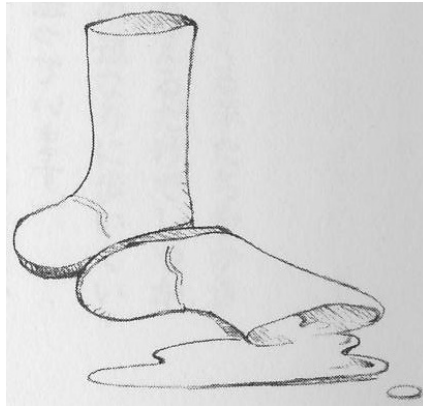
I started hearing a loud watery sound every time I stepped on the floor. I tried lifting a leg up, but the floor was dry and did not have a single drop of water. Despite this, when walking I heard this shlunk shlunk of a watery sound.

"I do not know when, but the boots appears to have filled with water...?"

I slipped off my feet, but the boots themselves remained filled with stagnant water.



"Seems stuff like that has been seen here and there in the Village of late."



"What kind of mechanism does this use?"

Grandfather was calm, like he was saying that this sort of thing was commonplace in this here solar system, but I did not hide my surprise.

"At the very least it seems to be gathering moisture from the air."

"But they look like normal boots..."

I could seriously not tell where that mechanism was woven into the things.

I scrutinized the boots closely, and Grandfather told me this.

"You go and have a look."

"...me?"

"Don't think there'll be problems if we leave these alone, but, yeah, we got a letter of complaints, so I'd say it's the right moment. Go ask around the Village, think of it as hands-on training."

"Oh dear me."

I overlapped my hands before me, lowered my eyes, and approached Grandfather's desk quietly and gracefully.

"Are you requesting my humble self to converse with an unspecifiable number of people?"

"As far as your daily life goes, it's a round trip between office and home, isn't it? You gotta stop doin' only that and mingle with the people of the Village, as well, and try to become a Mediator that everyone can rely upon, how about?"

"I am not good with talking to people whom I do not know."

"Also, this sort of outing is the job of the new hires."

"This is a dynamic development comparable to aspiring for the planning department yet once hired being sent to the sales department, which makes me somewhat hesitant."

"And ain't that a master move."

It appeared that I was still far from having a warm understanding with regards to my creative nature.

"...then I will be reluctantly going."

"Mh-hm."

And that was how it went, yes indeed.

After crossing a grazing land that reminded me of a green carpet of grass, wading through sheep who expressed affection by rubbing into people whenever they saw any, I arrived at stone walls about my height that looked like they were built out of casually stacked sleet

stones (but that was just how they looked, they were actually solidly built). The stone walls continued at the sides with a road in the middle, and following this street at a walk for five minutes, one could enter the location in which the Village's population gathered.

The time was around when preparations for dinner were about to start in many of the houses. And so the chimneys on the roofs here and there were blowing smoke. Everybody here worked towards self-sufficiency. People like us, who worked a specialized occupation and gained compensation were a tiny minority.

The currency system had been lost a great many moons ago. To preserve the lifestyle of people participating in cultural activities, a system of rationing tickets had been introduced, but... I did feel some inferiority, considering I did not gain my food with the sweat of my brow. I was not any good at speaking with people to begin with... but despite that, work was work. Making up my mind, I headed for case number one.

"E-, excuse me!"

The mortification of the self that was calling on people whom I was unfamiliar with living in a house that I was unfamiliar with was Investigation Activity Case Number One.

The door opened and a lady that appeared to be strict and formal appeared.

"I am very sorry to bother you at this busy hour. I come from the Office of Mediation."

"From the office, you say... are you really from the Office of Mediation?"

"Well... I have received permission and am making visits...?"

"Whose permission?"

"My Grandfather's."

"What are you talking about? You're suspicious, you know that?"

"And with that I take my leave."

"Really! What's it all about?"

And still she persisted well past the limits.

I retreated to the street and glanced at the door, and the lady was still giving me a suspicious gaze. Chase by that gaze I changed my location. When I was a fair bit distant, I could exhale at last. Now just where did that go wrong? That was a gaze that said I was guilty until proven innocent!

I felt crushed.

Sure, even I thought that that had been a slightly unspontaneous house call.

The act of making a house call held an overwhelming pressure. The instant the door opened my head went completely blank, and it became impossible to control what I was talking about. In my case, just talking to people I did not know had a fairly tiresome touch to it, so I had double the strain.

"...if only there was someone whose face I knew..."

It had been a month already since I graduated The School and returned to my hometown.

And yet still nobody I could call a friend existed in the Village. That said, it was not like there were no people that I did not know by face.

Rationing tickets: the last distribution system of the diminished cultural activities of the declined, reduced Former Humanity. The team of caravans that tied overland and overseas routes throughout the world could truly be called an indispensable lifeline. The caravan naturally came even here at Kusunoki Village. Things that could not be quite obtained in the land and medicine and more, all the things necessary for living, the very very limited luxury goods such as alcohol and tobacco, letters from acquaintances far away... that was the sort of things they carried.



While the caravan sojourned there, the square was a bazaar every day. It was a time in which the Village became alive, one on par with harvest time. The surplus products of the Village were exchanged with rationing tickets, which were used to exchange the products unloaded from the containers, then the caravan once again returned to their trade route.

When they did not sojourn there, private houses were put in charge of handling miscellaneous goods and foodstuff. Shops, they could have been called. And of course rationing tickets were accepted. But it was fine even if you did not have tickets, you know? Bartering, compensating physical labor, anything was fine. A system riddled with holes, this, indeed. But for the Former Humanity and their fading selfishness, there were no such things as past disputes, you see.

So, as I was hurrying about, I saw on the left side a two-floor cottage with white walls. The warehouse in here made for a sort of distribution center. There were several other private houses entrusted with this, but this was the one I used more often. Despite being a building in which medicine and foodstuff were preserved, the door was left wide open. There was no clerk either, and foodstuff and daily necessities and miscellanea were lying in a disordered line that continued even outside of the house.

There were no people.

In their stead, there was a chair in the exterior, and above it laid a single box for inserting rationing tickets. This place of sales was unattended, it seemed. I tried peeking inside and found only a few rationing tickets had been put within. Truly defenseless, this place.

"Uhm, may I have a brief moment please?"

I called over and a plump lady showed herself from a different building on the plot of land.

"Oh dear, you're the girl from sensei's place. Welcome. Is it eggs again today? This morning's batch is a little long in the tooth, but you can have as many as you want. Ah, right, right, how about some chicken leg? I just prepared some for dinner, I can share it with you, you know?"

This well sociable married lady was the owner of the store. She was the Eggs Lady. That was what she was called. Her husband a farmer, as the wife she raised poultry. That was why.

There were many who raised poultry here in the Village, but the people who did not came to take their share from the lady here. She treated everyone impartially, her disposition was quite generous, and she was loved by everyone.

Eggs were the foundation of sweets making.

I have in fact been talked to a number of times beyond count whenever I visited to supply ingredients. That was to be thankful for. Being poor at speaking myself we could never quite make a conversation, and I always felt sorry about that. However, today I was here for the job, as well, so I gave her my best smile and opened my mouth.

"I understand this is very impolite for me to inquire when you are so busy. I come under the encouragement of the fellows at the office of Mediation."

I would like leniency on the fact that the ratio of speech control fell below eighty percent and had therefore something of the childish mischief.

"Dear me, did you come for the job?"

Happily, the nuance went through.

"Yes, truth is—"

I explained the matter of the letter of complaints, and tried inquiring as to whether any strange event was taking place around her.

"Well then, now that you say it, my husband did say something about that. I don't really understand all that, is this about the weird things that are making the rounds?"

"Exactly, it is about that matter. Do you know anything?"

"Nobody knows what all that is, so I heard they're being stored at the community center."

Ohhh, this feels like the task will be completed in a single strike.

"The community center, then. Understood. Then I will thank you for the cooperation and, faithfully yours..."

"You really got it rough with that job. Here, have a little something."

The married lady gave me a small bottle of konpeitos.

"...t-, thank you very much."

Giving a 'little something' in these years...

"Say, by the by, I'm the one who made that tiny vegetables garden right over there. Right now, well, I'm growing carrots. You can make sweets, can you? How about making a carrot cake next time?"

"Ah, of course, I could."

"Carrots are really simple. I planted the seeds in March and they just grew and grew, and soon I'll be able to harvest them. Using them only in stews and soups is boring, so I'm really asking this as a favor."

"Indeed, then I shall undertake it."

"I'm looking forwards to that! Thanks!"

Leaving the lady to watch me as I went, I headed for the community center.

What a relief, I could now avoid making calls from door to door.

There was no need to have one's willpower dampened by inadequate inquiries, one simply had to first inquire into acquaintances, yes indeed.

I gave Grandfather's name at the community center and my job ended right away.

The wooden box handed to me almost reflexively had a countless number of daily necessities that did not seem in any way strange at a glance tossed inside. As if to say that that was everything.

"Are these tools really that enigmatic, I wonder..."

Even with doubts in my mind I held the wooden box as I returned to the office, where I found that Grandfather had seemingly gone out. First thing, I will catalog the recovered tools.

Starting from those boots from before.

"What is this... what goal could it achieve?"

The boots filled with water as one walked. And that despite how boots were worn in order to avoid one's socks from being wet in days of rain. To put it bluntly, this item served no purpose whatsoever. Only the fairies could make something like this.

The fairies – they who act as the humanity of the present Earth were as of now still a bundle of mysteries.

Us Mediators have been systematically deployed in order to act as intermediaries between them and people, but in exchange for how nothing was explained there was no development of any sort, and the relationship between the two species came to be stable...

"And then people went on the decline."

I tossed the pointless boots in the box.

"...nothing doing."

No matter how much I examined them, I could not even begin to grasp the boots' hidden nature. For the time being, the matter of the boots was drawing a blank.

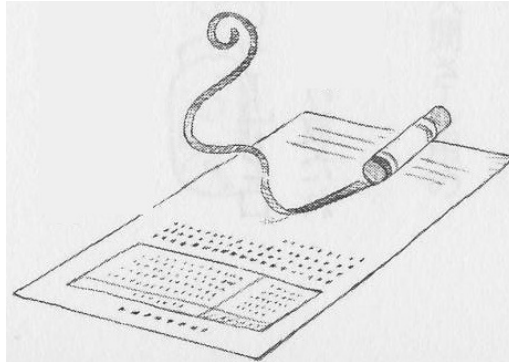
I took out another tool from the wooden box.

"This one... is a pastel?"

It was as it looked like. It was a generic pastel stick with nothing whatsoever strange about it. However, as pastels were of course writing tools, its true worth could not be understood until



used. I tried drawing a line in an empty space on a document. After I did, the drawn line suddenly lifted its head and peeled itself off of the blank paper, and flexing its body(?) it flew off of the document.



"EeEK?!"

It squirmed on the desk's top with motions that reminded me of an earthworm or a centipede, but then it opened its mouth(?) and threatened me with a hiss, after which it hopped on the floor and just slithered away. It leaped onto the open window and escaped to the outside. That was one heroic dive from the third floor.

"...what to even say... this is completely incomprehensible..."

...it looked like there was nothing to do but record the event as it happened.

The next thing I took out from the wooden box was a tiny bottle.

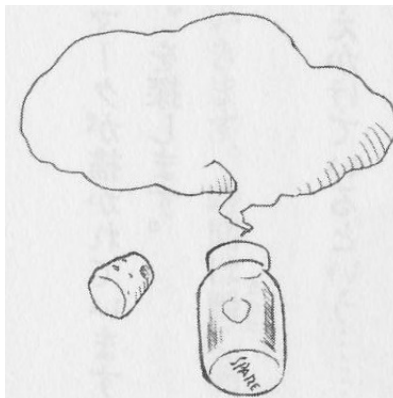
It was plugged with a cork, and inside was filled to the absolute brim with a milky white liquid.

"Is this a bottle of milk?"

It was light for being one. It could also be thought that the inside of the bottle had only been carefully painted white. To figure this out, there was no other possibility but to remove the cap. After adequately steadying my resolve, I twisted off the cork as I held it with one hand. Plunk, there was a nice sound, and a white smoke began billowing out.

The smoke's strength was all too intense, and in a few seconds all I could see of the inside of the room was the sole color white.

"But now I just cannot see anything!"



One of the properties of smoke is that it spreads, I believe. But as it happened, fairy smoke kept its rounded mass and filled the room with the density of cotton candy. It could be

touched.

"...now just what sort of tool...?"

The bottle had remained opened.

Scribbled on the bottom was the English word *SPARE*.

"A spare."

A spare cloud?

I grasped the soft cloud with my hands and chased it out of the window. The cloud had some buoyancy, because as soon as it went out of the window it fluffily ascended up in the sky. I see, most definitely a spare cloud.

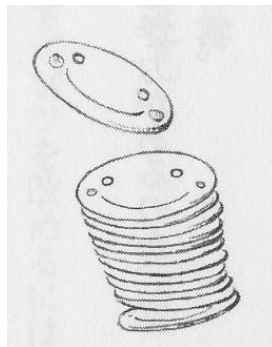
"Pointless..."

I only then realized it, that all of these had been made in human size. In other words, the tools were manufactured for humans. A present to the humans from the fairies.

*"Spare cloud. Use it when you want a cloud."*

That was what I wrote. I felt like I had a good grasp of it.

I quickly emptied the contents of the wooden box on top of the desk. My eyes hit on a pile of patches. They had about the size of coasters, and were a set of twelve. A smiling face was drawn on their surface.



I glanced around the office, then began searching for the one thing that just was *not* required from the item.

"I suppose this is it."

They were decorations for totem poles.

They were very old things, already blackened all over, and even the engravings on them were coming off... something that would not be an exaggeration to call merely standing poles.

I peeled off the back of one patch and tried sticking it on a totem pole.

"Ooooooh!"

The smiley let out a voice of deep resentment.

"It speaks..."

However, it had no ears, so it did not answer my words.

*"The paaaaaaain!"*

He was saying it hurts...

*"I left something behind... I left something behiiiind..."*

The pattern was that of retrospection on life.

*"I curse you for cutting me doooown... I curse you for cutting me dooown."*

Could this patch be...?

*"I depart..."*

"Excuse me?"

The smiley went dark all at once, and a crack formed on the totem pole, though it was not deep when touched.

"Owww... it died..."

It was a fairly old thing to begin with, it may have gone senile.

"Indeed, the effect of this tool is..."

Sorting through my thoughts, I wrote this down on the document.

*"Translation patches. Set of twelve. Give voices to things that say nothing."*

I decided to give up on further analysis and record things as they were. Even about the tools before these.

*"Boots for sunny days. Wearing them makes water accumulate within. Allows one to enjoy the splashy sound of shoes filled with water when walking."*

*"Pastel stick that draws living lines. The drawn line becomes alive."*

From one to the next I named, inspected the effect, and recorded down the Fairy Tools. Time passed in the blink of an eye.

"Ohhh, so you're back," said Grandfather as he returned.

"Welcome back."

"Mh-hm. So, is this... that?"

"At present it seems these are everything."

"What's this?"

He took a black tin can in hand.

"That one I could not open. So I have no way to be certain."

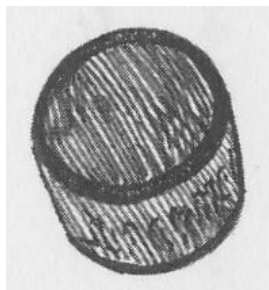
"It looks like a normal tin can, though..."

"I tried many things, but I could not even put a dent in it. At present its usage is unknown. By the way, what do you think a black hole is?"

"What did you say?"

Grandfather's voice was a little bit strained.

"It was written on the label. Black characters on a black label were hard to understand, of course, but reading closely... it says '*contents: black hole (1 pc)*'. I cannot open it so I cannot eat it, however."





"...course it won't open, no matter what physical means existing on this Earth you use."

"Really?"

"Can I keep this?"

Just a little bit, but Grandfather's voice felt excited.

"Well, I do not mind. But a tin can that cannot be opened, truly, it cannot be eaten, can it."

"This ain't food. This is for admiring... no, for recreation... for intellectual games, I believe."

Grandfather gazed at the tin can and let out an ecstatic sigh.

"And so, what kind of item is that, in the end?"

"You don't know about the astrological phenomenon of black holes, huh. Astronomy these days is really just a hobbyistic branch of learning... not that hard to accept, given it's elusive and useless."

"Are there black holes in space?"

"That's the right answer right there... well, to explain it simply, there's the remnants of a star inside here."

He held up the can with three fingers as he said that.

"The remnants of a star... I do not know what, but putting that inside of a tin can would be, well..."

"We can't tell whether the thing's actually inside here or not. Maybe it's the natural thing caught from space, maybe it's some compound grown at the bottom of a flask, or maybe it's just some kind of joke. Might be that there never was anything inside. It depends on how you take it, I suspect. It's just, if this tin can contains a black hole then it would be odd if it didn't have some means to cut off massive gravitational forces. Thinking from the viewpoint of a hobbyist, there should be no lie here. This tin can has really been endowed with enough strength to preserve a black hole. If it wasn't, this would be unfunny as a joke."

"Huh."

Grandfather was quite taken by this.

"A thing this sturdy's unlikely to be broken by external means. Therefore, it's impossible to see what's inside. We can't know what is inside here, or perhaps what isn't inside here, without opening it, but we have no way of opening it. No, no, no, I suppose we shouldn't open it. Whatever else, it would create a spot of massive gravity on the surface of the Earth."

"...so, we cannot know what is inside?"

"That's right. Amusing, isn't it?"

He looked very pleased as he toyed with the tin can in his palm.

"I do not quite understand, but if this ends up going very badly, you will please take responsibility, Grandfather, all right?"

"That's OK. In case this tin can is opened and it contains the real deal, I'll take responsibility for everything."

He smothered his voice as he began laughing. It is the Romance of Men, or something like that. Well, I was going to leave that part to Grandfather and go on with my work, I supposed. I felt the passage of time as quick when there were things to do.

I sunk into the fruitless yet fun work of examining and recording the Fairy Tools until the sun had set.

Even on the following day there was no sign that work would end.

The reason being that there was a mountain's worth of these tools, and I had only finished investigating no more than about half of them.

Humans went astray when they had nothing to do. When lazing idly for long hours in the

warm sunlight, the impurities clinging to the inside of the heart fall away, and all the worries and all the discontents vanished entirely... and enveloped by a pleasantness close to the drowsiness, thoughts stagnated without end. Like, *sluuump*.

I did not like to be too busy, but constructive work was a good thing.

"I'm going out for a bit."

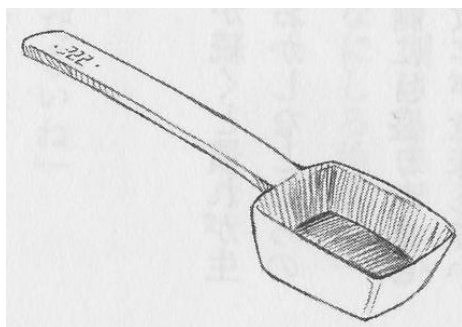
Grandfather was as always wandering out aimlessly.

In the office all alone, I silently got lost in the job.

The Fairy Tools were all irrational / of unclear application / inexplicable, but as stimulation continued a habit was formed, and no matter what happened I was not surprised. On the contrary, a measuring spoon with absolutely nothing strange to it caught my attention.

As far as appearance, it was a small spoon. As it was for measuring its bottom was square and it had gradations on the inside. On the grip side, the number 322 was carved in relief.

The meaning of the numbers was unknown. Nothing happened when I swung it, there was no kind of suspicious button or switch, it did not speak it did not shine it did not shiver it did not merge with other things and it did not fly.



"Is it actually a normal spoon?"

These were things gathered by the people of the Village. There is a possibility that they could have made a mistake and let a normal spoon get mixed in. It is just... and there I rethought things.

The proper usage of a measuring spoon... that would be in the making of sweets.

"How about we give it a try, then."

Cookies: done.

"Nothing happened."

With nothing to be done about it I brewed some tea, and brought it and the cookies as I returned to my room.

And then it was tea time. Well, it was just about time for a tea in the morning.

"In the end, I could not understand its purpose."

I carried the tea to my mouth while I tossed up the spoon. The spoon left my fingers with inertia, spinning around as it leaped up until the ceiling. What was unexpected was how, after impacting with the ceiling, it bounced back with good force and bumped me on the top of my head.

Ow, went the sharp pain..... that did not come.

"Well now?"

In exchange, I felt a sort of an odd sensation in my head.

With fearful fingers I searched around, and... the spoon, on my head, was totally, jutting out of

it, vertically, was it not (words tangled due to shivering)?!

".....but, how?"

I touched about the handle of the spoon standing proud like a horn, and the impact came with a delay.

"I have been stabbed?!"

In my head, right at its top!

In the font that remains everlasting howevermuch it is scooped up!

The color drained from my face, my tongue went dry, my body shivered.

With things like this I had to require medical treatment, but being so confused that I could not put my reason to work, I nearly reflexively ripped it out. Sliimely, with a nasty sensation the spoon came to be held in my hand. Happily there was no pain whatsoever.

But I had better avoid bleeding, this might be an injury that, mistreated, could mean my life... and that was when I once more tried to search for the wound with my fingertips, but I could not find it.

"But that means..."

No matter how hard I searched I could not find the injury itself. My fingertips were not smeared with either blood nor with that pink thinking matter that ought never be depicted in the world of the Marchen.

I inspected the spoon. I expected there would be blood on the side I was stabbed with.

Instead of blood or gray matter, what filled the spoon to the brim was a powder.

"I-, is this...?"

I tried licking just a little.

"Cake flour, I see."

It may in truth have been something else, but the conclusion I could draw just from the touch of the tongue was that.

In other words, similarly to how the boots filled with water, this was a spoon that filled with flour.

From people's heads...

As a test I stuck it into my arm, but it did not pierce in. I pointed it at my head and, all too easily—

"...and in it went."

When I pulled it out, the spoon was filled to the brim with cake flour.

"An ingredient for sweets... an endless amount of it..."

I did feel afraid, but since fairies built it, it should not be dangerous. This spoon was definitely an item for turning the feelings people believed in into ingredients for sweets. Ingredients were of course not free. But from now onwards, I could obtain as much as I could wished, no matter how much...

Though I was well immersed in deep emotions, my hand rapidly continued to scoop cake flour out of my head.

Soon after that, there was a mountain of cake flour on the desk.

Suddenly I was struck by dizziness, and my sights faded, then blacked out.

"Oh dear..."

I put a hand on the back of the chair and calmed my emotions with long exhaled breaths.

Happily, I quickly regained my vision. It appeared to have been a light bout of anemia. First things first I sat down on the chair and wiped the sweat that had come out in that instant. As I calmed down, I felt something odd about my surroundings.

Now what was wrong about this? I could not see anything strange anywhere. Be it the wall or



the desk or the chair, or even the frame hanging on the wall, all was as I was used seeing. It was only the thing set on the desk... the models, the cookies, and the cake flour had disappeared. I thought they were right there!

I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but what had vanished did not return.

Indeed, nothing whatsoever had changed. If I had to say anything was weird, there was this enormous spoon that had enlarged to about the length of my height.

A SPOON THE LENGTH OF MY HEIGHT –

3, 2, 1, 0! (countdown)

"EEEEEEK! IT'S HUUUUUGE!!!"

Nooo! Supersize gets a nooo!

The measuring spoon had become gigantic!

It was either a scoop, or it was a useless chunk of iron, this accursed thing.

There was one more difference.

"...the numbers... they've changed?"

31.

I was sure that initially it was around 320.

What that number signified... what could it have been, then. If it indicated the size of the spoon, then going from 320 to 31 would be contradictory.

"I do not understand... just what is going on..."

Going back for a moment and consulting with Grandfather seemed to be the best way. I shouldered the spoon, opened the door, and rushed to the world outside.

It was vast.

There was an altogether too vast world spread there before me.

There was wood under my feet, and massive knotholes had been drilled here and there. At the side towered a small white mountain, it was like the view on a snowy mountain. But it also looked like a pile of powder.

In another direction there were several golden-browened planks piled up, seemingly abandoned. But they also looked like massive baked sweets.

And so what used to be a corridor had now become a massive wooden-floored plain.

Though I looked for the sky far away, there was a mist there and I could not see through to what was there. Advancing on the vast space, I found that I quickly reached its end.

A precipice.

The land disappeared as if it had been cut off with a saw. I approached the edge and got on all fours, gazing down below, and saw that a massive chair was imposingly sitting there.

".....well."

I returned to the room at a run. I leaped at the frame hung in the room... Grandmother's portrait.

"This is the Mona Lisa, is it not!"

In the frame there was not Grandmother, but a Mona Lisa stamp.

"Th-, then?!"

I grasped my head, attempted to sort through the situation, and reached one conclusion.

"Nothing else except that I have become tinyyyYYYY!!!"

The room with the miniature furniture. The mountain of cake flour. The cookies that looked like planks. And finally, the massive spoon.

This was the world on top of my desk!

"Aaaaargh!"

But why? How? Was I not human sized until a moment ago?

The only thing that was increasing was my confusion. I ran left and right, clawing at empty space, the weight of reality crashing all at once on my shoulders, and I ended up squatting on the spot.

"...is this spoon to blame?"

No other cause was thinkable.

"What do I do... if I were to break this, would I go back to normal?"

Conversely, it was possible that if I destroyed it I would never again return to being a human, so careless conclusions were out of the question. At a stagger I tried returning to the miniature house (currently open for display), sitting down on the not particularly elaborate chair. I needed to think about what to do next.

"First, consultation."

When I was at a loss or had something I did not understand, before investigating, ask. That was it.

That said, at this size I could only really consult with the fairies themselves.

"If only Grandfather were in..."

Shall we go to the office and ask for said consultation?

No, with a body this tall, the voyage to the office would be preposterously long. There were dislevels, as well, and first of all I could not even imagine how to descend from this desk. I could not open a single door on my own strength. I may or may not have been able to climb the stairs. Awww, being tiny was so inconvenient...

"It would be better if I were to live here like this, indeed."

I had gigantified sweets. For a while I was not to be inconvenienced as far as food.

I had only two walls, and the ceiling was well and truly removed, but the 'real roof' was way above, so I had no worries about the elements.

"Why, it feels safe to live in."

Leaving my weight to the chair's back, I closed my eyes. Calm feelings enveloped me.

"Let us just give up."

When confronted by a hopeless situation, the first thing was to give up. There. Flailing about was unbecoming of an intellectual species, do understand. Making one's resolve with head lifted in pride was a good thing.

From the entrance I heard Grandfather returning home.

"Ahhh, GRANDFATHEER! GRANDFAAAAATHEEER! HEEEEEEEEEEEEELP!!!"

I shouted with the whole of my survival instinct behind it.

"GRANDPAAA! GRAAAAAANDPAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!"

Something terrible has happened to your adorable grandaughteEEEEEEEEEEEEER!"

The stomping echo of footsteps drew near my room.

"You there?"

"Here! I am HEEERE!"

I tried waving my hands about and hopping several times.

Grandfather was huge... and his gaze stopped precisely on me.

"Ooh, what's this...!"

"Please help me!, look at what happened to me!"

Grandfather, perhaps with the help of the size, looked more reliable and knowledgeable as he approached.

"There was actually so and so! And such and such?!"

Situation explanation (desperation MAX).

"Mh-hm, mh-hm."

"I-, it was this spoon! The spoon turned my body portable! It made my body easily carriableEEEE!"

Grandfather said a tiny thing with adoration in his eyes.

"Don't know how, but it seems you got lost in here, little fairy."

Excuse me?

"Uhm, I am not a fairy, however, I am your granddaughter, all right?"

The size may have become small, but my looks are identical, correct?

Grandfather drew his face closer to me and said this with formal attitude.

"I am sorry. At present, my granddaughter appears to be out."

Well now?

"I am telling you, I am that granddaughter... well, someone that came from that granddaughter at least?"

"Hoh, I see, then. You came to play, did you."

What the?

It seemed my words were just not reaching him...?

My voice was low, and so it did not reach his ears, was that it?

"I am telling you, this is no game, this is work!"

I was hopping as I appealed to him with that.

"Hahahah, even playing is a serious thing, isn't it. Might just be as you say, I'm sure."

What the?

It was not like I was not reaching him at all, it appeared that he only picked up words very fragmentarily... but how is it that, despite that, the meaning would not reach him?

It seemed that I was somehow still slightly confused, so I decided to focus my calmness and awareness into the words I spoke.

"Are you alone today?"

"Aye."

Did I always have a voice this high pitched?

"Seems that you like that spoon."

Right, the spoon. I held the key item of the day aloft, showing it to him.

"Muh?"

I closely inspected the words I was uttering.

*"Please observe carefully, boss. This is a most inexplicable spoon. It has the power to reduce the sizes of people, and the mechanism which with it does that remains shrouded in mystery. In the unlikely case that this is dangerous to people, early-stage disaster prevention following a prompt investigation is required. That is the duty that one ought fulfill as Mediator."*

...that was the phrase I was trying to say, but what actually came out of my mouth was—

"Gramps, gramps, look?"

Oh dear dear dear?!

My sentence ended up simplified?

Could it be that even all my words until then were made far simpler than what I was cognizant of...?

"That's a measuring spoon, right? Wonder what that number is."

Grandfather took the spoon in hand.

*"Please be careful. If you scoop your head with that spoon, you will exchange something*



*important to you as a person for flour!"*

"Wanna scoop?"

This was the world of the Fairy Language where not a single thing could be explained.

"Yup, a spoon is normally use to scoop things up."

"Scoop!" (Translation: absolutely never scoop up your head!)

That had a fairly simple sentence structure though, dammit!

"There's numbers engraved here, I see. 1275... I guess that's what it is?"

How there were lots more than with me was troublesome, but right now was not the time for that.

"There's lots of it!"

It was not the time for that, but this body's spinal cord went and responded, did it not.

On top of having somehow become tiny, it seemed that my ability to use words and my outwards appearance had deteriorated. That was why even to Grandfather's eyes I looked like nothing more than a fairy, that was how it went.

"Here, I'll give it back to you."

"Oh joy!"

I could not lose the spoon until I had solved the mystery. I will be carefully affixing it to my back.

"My granddaughter might be in the office. If I go now, I could tell her that you've come. There's cookies over there, too, so sorry for leaving you alone but just take it easy with them."

Grandfather kept his best formal face until the end and left the room.

Sigh... my sole and only lifeline was gone.

"Gramps! Bye!"

Though sad and disheartening, my body went and cordially waved a hand, it did...

"Mh-mh!"

With things like this, there was truly nothing to do anymore but to go ask actual fairies.

I had to seek out the elusive fairies, inquire about the spoon, and ask about a way to return to normal.

I pulled out a few cookies, ripped up some paper mats, and used them in the stead of wrapping paper.

This was going to be my packed lunch.

And so—

I did not believe that fairies would die when jumping off of high places. Same as tiny insects such as fleas, since their bodies were light, it was safe for them to fall even from a height several times their own. At present my body was also light... or so I thought, but, but, but.

"Too high!"

The world I could look down at from the edge of the desk was an abyss the likes of the very depths of Hell.

Too high! Too scary! I might die!

"Ah, riiight!"

The chair... if I used the chair as halfway point for jumping down I might get something done, how about that?

"Mmmh... still too high!"

That was because the abyss only became halved, of course. This was impossible.

"But I'm still going, you know?"

Huh?

Before I could steady my resolve, my carefree body made a hopped dive on its own. There was disagreement between my body and my miiiiiiiiIND!

"...I survived?"

My body landed on the chair without a single injury.

"I'm... a fairy?" (Translation: it appears that my physical abilities had also become comparable to a fairy's.)

Next was a hoppity from the chair to the floor. This too was a perfectly safe landing. I felt no pain whatsoever in my feet, either.

At present I was about ten centimeters tall, and with the height up to the seat of the chair being around forty centimeters... I could be nonchalant about heights that from a human perception were of six-seven meters.

"chalant!"

The fairies could also hop down safely from high places, of course.

It appeared that, as long as it was not an excessive height, I did not need to worry about it, then.

"Awrighty!"

Let us bite down on the courage that I gained just by being tiny. I absolutely had to meet the fairies.

Right, since I was there... let us have a dive into the wicker basket that I had carelessly cast into the lowest shelf of the bookcase. It was stuffed with things for toys that I left there thinking I would eventually fix them.

Khaki-colored shorts and a short-sleeved shirt with many pockets. I also dug up a set of boots in good condition. And finished it with an explorer's rucksack made for dolls.

These were things from my childhood, and as I thought that I would eventually give them to the fairies, I kept them there instead of throwing them away. I never once thought I would ever be using them myself, however...

"Also, it'd be nice if there was a helmet or something?"

Sadly there was no helmet.

And there I decided to take one of the eggshells stabbed into a potted plant and wear it on the head.

With spoon and lunch on my back, preparations were OK.

Today's fieldwork was... going to be a grand adventure.

"Joooy!" (Translation: I'm looking forwards to it.)

No, this was a matter of life and death... we have to do it seriously, I say.

Did you understand that, my dear body?

I came into the corridor from the slightly opened door. But as I was heading for what this time was the real exit to the wooden-planked corridor, my feet for some reason made these cutesy pitter-patter sounds. There was no such device in the boots, and it appeared that things were just like that. Fairy noises?

A human becoming small...

There were a number of tales like that, I believed. In my recollections, the stories did not delve much into how the worldview changed with the scale becoming smaller.

The differences were far more numerous than I thought.

First, the sense of distance was conclusively driven mad.

Locations nearby were normally visible to the sight, but gazing into the distance did not work as well as when I was human. Concretely speaking, let us take the ceiling. When looking up

when I was a human, it looked like a normal ceiling, but now... it was inexplicably hazy. It did not appear like there was a physical mist obstructing the sight.

The limited powers of awareness of my body turned into fairy size did not allow me to reach a full field of vision... it could not fully process the information coming from the sense of sight, that was how I imagined it. This may be a rough comparison, but it was like how a human could not observe infrared light with the naked eye.

In the same way, things human could see the fairies could not see... going beyond the thing about the visible light, there would be areas and concepts that neither understanding nor wisdom could reach, would there?

And that was the theory I had on the matter of the mist.

The way in which nothing but light shone down from the mist that covered the place where the ceiling should be... it made me think of the background of a sublime religious painting.

"...sigh."

I walked for a bit and the walls towering at my sides (the corridor's walls, as they were) suddenly vanished, and I came out into a wide space. The impression as I looked at it was different, but I suspected that this was the room in which the dinner table was. A number of what seemed like pillars with smooth wooden surfaces were standing there, starting from the ground and piercing into the heavens.

Maybe... the legs of the table and the chairs.

If so, then advancing by weaving in the spaces through the legs meant I would soon find the exit.

Just exiting the house was taking this much effort... how was it going to go once I went outside? Unease struck me. About how not only I had to out set on a voyage, but how, more importantly, I needed to encounter the fairies. I thought about waiting for them to visit my room, but at times they did not come there for several days in a row, so I could not make the choice of standing on watch. As I indulged in thought, before my eyes I could see the door of my house standing solemnly, reminding me of Dante's Gate to Hell.

"Hyuge!" (Translation: that is quite large.)

As I expected, the upper part of the door stretched far enough up that it twisted distance, vanishing inside the mist that indicated an area that could not be recognized. It appeared impossible to open it with my strength alone, but right next to it was a tiny vent, at a size that I at present could easily pass through.

"Leavin'!"

It was impossible to hold back my (body's) enthusiasm, and I rushed with a pointless dash into that tiny hole. Eeek!

Diving into unknown places with a headfirst slide was an iron rule of fairy instinct, it seemed. The inside me who governed thoughts wished for more importance to be given to prudence on those matters, however. This time, happily, I managed to come safely outside.

"Oooh?"

Outside. The outdoors. That trite world I now felt ten times more radiant than usual.

The light was all too strong. I did not think there would be this big a difference between indoor and outdoor light. In my mind, the beams of light from the heavens turned into a waterfall and poured downwards with a strong current. Although it was the light, I also saw it as drawing a gentle arc, which must have my fairy eyes to blame, I supposed. The organic curves had a vivid presence to them, and the beams branched off in numbers beyond count as they surrounded me as they descended.

It was not only the sunlight that appeared so magnificent. The mere ground, laid bare to the

cold elements, now reminded me of a well-stuffed pancake. The sparsely growing weeds had the lively energy of lush, fresh wheat, and the pebbles laying casually scattered about had the appearance of majestic, massive rocks naturally planed magnificently set in their own positions.

The world seen with small eyes was all too exotic, and because of that, beautiful.

Suddenly, I was dominated by the silly thought of rushing into that nature and just melting and mingling with it.

"Hummm, next time, that!"

...no, we will not do that next time, because that was something that should never happen in one's entire life, do understand.

The conclusion of dream chasing was always a grotesque dead end.

Sigh, it felt that with every new development my fairyesque instinct was eating away at my reason...

"I really wanna go someplace where I can see everything!"

Right, right, we must determine a location that looked likely to have fairies.

"And up there, we have lunch?"

Not that!

There was a hill near the house. If I went there, I should have a sweeping view of the area.

"Go! Go!"

My toes pointed towards the direction in which the hill should be.

...although I had to hope I could actually make it there, of course.

Yessir, I was lost.

This was a perfect and utter disaster. Thank you very much. You are a great help each and every day.

"Where'm I?!"

As expectable I was a little bit tense in both mind and body.

Although I was walking on plains, the roof of weeds cut off the sunlight, and because of that I had not realized that at some point I had strayed into deep woods. I was right in the middle of a luxuriant and overgrown jungle. Were I to have been human sized, however, this would be have been little more than a patch of dense grass.

Sigh, I sort of understood the reason why fairies saw humans as special...

But at present I was not one of those lofty humans, I was a fairy.

"Now what do I dooo?"

I was standing right there smack in the middle of the place when the tall grass made a rustling sound.

What appeared then was a massive pillbug.

It had a size of around thirty centimeters.

That was how it was seen from the viewpoint of me at present, who did not reach the ten centimeters in height, I expected that in reality it would be a specimen of around one-to-five centimeters in size.

A giant insect had made its arrival. That was a situation that would normally make me jump, but at present I was mostly dominated by the impudence of a fairy, so I was completely calm. The pillbug didn't spend one moment on my presence, and followed the ground using its antennas as it moved forwards little by little.

Also, when I listened well, I heard muttered whispers. From the very pillbug.

"Food. Food. Food. Dark places. Humid places. Dark places. Food. Food. Dark places..."



I was surprised to find I could understand its words.

That too had to be a power concealed within the body of a fairy.

"Food. Dark places. Food. Dark places."

Pillbugs really liked dark places, indeed. The bottom of planters, for example.

"Hellooo?"

"Food."

"Excuse meeee?"

"Dark places."

It seemed that a conversation was not going to happen.

It was just dispassionately uttering its desires, and though that could be said to appear human-like, it felt that no warmth whatsoever dwelt within it. It was clear that Pillbugese was not made for reciprocal understanding. It was doing nothing but emitting the plain chattering of instinct, and it might have been that it was just my ears extracting intent from them.

Completely lost in dowsing with its antennae, the pillbug then stuck its head into the damp soil and began eating ferociously. It squirmingly chewed through the nearly-rotten earth it had dug up leaving behind a trail.

Seeing it so single-minded, I was itching to bother it, was I not.

But that would be so mean... I could never do that! I would never do it!

"You worm!"

I sent it flying with a kick straight to the abdomen.

No, it was my body on its own, it was...

The poor little pillbug spun and curled itself up.

"Defense. Defense. Defense. Defense..."

It must have been confused by fear, because it was shivering slightly.

"I apologize..."

I promptly took my distance from that spot.

It was out of the question to walk around without thoughts, but as it happened I got lost in an even darker place than before.

"I'm sooo hungry."

I for the time being shelved the present situation that was my being lost and investigated whether I ought to have some of the lunch I packed.

Here the scent of earth was oddly strong, it was a place I could not quite settle down into. I had the feeling I should not be stopping here for long. Awww, I still wanted to eat. I wanted to eat right then. I could not hold back anymore.

By the time I thought that I had already opened the parcel I carried as packed lunch.

Just one of the cookies was far bigger than my head. This was good bang for the buck. With a volume like this, half of one of these would make for one meal's worth. I opened my mouth wide and bit a chunk off, and a soft sensation spread wide inside. Cookies made with a pastry bag had a little bit of wetness to them, and they were heavenly.

Suddenly, my sights were covered by the color black.

"...isn't it too dark?"

My head was firmly seized by something hard, and it was pitch black like someone had put a sack above my head. A smelly and warm breathing that shuddered like an earthquake came from the depths of the sack... this, no, it cannot be, was it a beak?

My vigilance had seemingly slackened as I was eating, or maybe a fairy's body had no faculties of vigilance to begin with. I had been bitten into by an ill-omened bird that had descended from behind.

I was nimbly lifted up towards the heavens.  
The bird faced the sky with its prey (me) in his mouth, and it shook as it tried to swallow.

"P!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!?!"

I did not want to be eaten by a bird like I was nice and tastyyyyyyyyy!  
I struggled onto death and broke free, then ran as fast as my legs could carry me.  
"I'm a humaaan! I'm a HUUUMAAAN!"

"Prey. Prey. Prey. Prey."

Awww, I could understand the words of the bird! But understanding them did not make me happy in the slightest!

The bird chased me, screaming 'PREEEY'.

"Prey. Eat. Prey. Eat."

I ran away frantically, but my opponent had faster legs and I was promptly caught.

"N'PIII?!"

Ah, but when I thought that far it was already late, and a beak attack stabbed me in the head.

"...awww..."

Having received a fatal wound to the head, my awareness unhurriedly came to a halt.

Awww, awww, it just had to happen to me!

And that was how the end of my life was declared there and then.

Humanity Has Declined ~ THE END

### **Explanation (by the Editorial Department)**

Since the dawn of history, the paths of our world have been carved out little by little by the hands of researchers in their attempts to touch on the deepest mysteries of all creation.

Those ought to be outstanding deeds, however for some reason we are all indifferent to that fact. Is there nothing to be done on the matter?

To us, living as we are in the society of the present that invariably demands the majority of our thinking skills in order to live from day to day, things such as scholarly retrospectives hold no worth except for a very limited number of dilettantes, that is certainly true.

However, we would like you to think. The boundless surface of the Earth dominates a space of over five hundred million square kilometers, and we, as the one and only intelligent species controlling by our will alone all of its varied resources and fertile soils, have had our lives threatened by insatiable, terrifying beasts, haven't we? We, who possess nothing but a weak body, were thrust to the top of the food chain by that spirit of inquiry that utilizes intelligence to turn the unknown into the well-know, weren't we? When thinking about all these things, we believe that it would not be an unprofitable endeavor to spare some time to allow our thoughts to be carried, alongside a perhaps inopportune snicker, towards the pitiable final hours of a foolish and inexperienced researcher.

This document has been compiled for those diligent readers who possess inquisitiveness mixed with the occasional snickering, and—

What the-, wait, wait, wait with that unkind explanation wait!!!

"...bwhaaat?"

The head that I expected shattered... did not hurt. This was not The End. It appeared that I was alive.

"Bother. Bother. Bother bother."

What had been pierced was only the eggshell that I wore in the stead of a helmet. With its beak unable to break free from the shell, the bird was flapping its head about in a panic on that spot.

This was my chance to survive!

I dashed headfirst into a thicket nearby to escape. I pushed my way through the grass and went into its depths.

Birds ruled by hunting instincts were scary. No, not just birds, I was going to have to pay attention to each and every carnivorous being from here onwards.

...but what should I be doing, when I have no detailed know-how of the Law of the Jungle, that was the question.

"Have we lost him? Have we lost him?"

There was no sign that the bird was in pursuit.

I could exhale a sigh of relief.

From here onwards I had to be careful when coming into open places, indeed.

However, this present situation, where I walked about without a destination with neither map nor familiarity with the terrain, did make me desire for some sort of new development... and soon as I thought that, I saw the village.

"Opportune?" (Translation: just at the right time.)

The village was inside a hole dug out of a withered tree. Plain, tiny straw-thatched houses laid there as if hugging each other.

Here birds would not sneak in, and even if external enemies were to come, the ramparts of withered wood would protect it.

There was a village. It had protection from external enemies. In short, this must mean that intelligent life forms lived there. And at present, what was the intelligent life form that existed on this Earth besides the former humanity?

"Fairieees! Fairieeeeeees! Help meeee!!!"

I went to one of the houses and violently knocked with both hands and one leg on a door that may well have been a vertically laid board. After a moment, the door opened silently. From inside the house with its thatched roof there appeared a teensy creature with a fluffy chestnut colored fur.

"What is it?"

"...huuh?" He was different from the fairies I knew. "Who might you be?"

"Is that something that the one coming to visit should ask, now?"

The master of the small house was a small mammal of the order of Rodentia mouse subfamily hamster... and he was emitting an aura from all through his body like he was instigating the vicious communication rule that is *don't you at least got any manners?*

I was invited inside the small house and treated to beastly drinks.

"Here. It's cold."

"Thanks!"

A tiny green leaf with a bead of water on it was set on top of the flat stone that was the table.





This appeared to be their tableware.

"It's the first dew of the morning, so it's good."

"No need to follow tea ceremony procedures?"

I put my tongue on the drop and the green leaf too, and found that it was cold water that released a pleasant feeling in my mouth. A single drop still seemed more than enough to fill a whole cup.

"We're of the family of Siberian hamsters."

"Huh."

The hamster, his behind set down on a stone chair opposite me, skillfully balanced himself and actually managed to sit like a human. Everything was plain, but he was clearly putting on his best, and he appeared more intellectual than he seemed.

"Yes, I know what it means to say it, but we're the sole and only intellectual culture on this Earth."

"...so you think that?"

Well, self-definitions were free, indeed.

"So, about you... can't you talk in any other way?"

"Hey ho?"

"From your looks, though not at our level you seem to have high intellectual faculties, so... I wondered if you couldn't at least hold a functional conversation."

"Well, so serious, really..." In one go I focused my awareness and restrained my instinct with full force, and so... "...there is nothing that cannot be done."

"The intellectual way of speaking is what suits us."

"Huh..."

It really tired me, however...

Now then, I had a mountain of things to ask. Where should I start from? As I was thinking, a question came from my interlocutor.

"Ahhh, I do have a question... who are you, exactly?"

"You mean me? I am merely a human."

"A human...?"

"Of the former humanity. We were the rulers of the Earth. We were famous."

The hamster pressed his paw on his mouth and stifled a giggling laugh. Every time he laughed out his cheek pouch filled to the brim.

"Now then, enough of those jokes. The rulers of the Earth are us hamsters."

It appeared that like this one did not know about the larger world.

"My name is Yameta. It means 'clever in a certain sense'."

"I am surprised to see we can converse."

"That's because we are an intelligent species."

"But for calling yourselves intelligent you are comparatively..."

I gazed around the small house. I could spot nearly no furniture that could be called furniture. The wall that surrounded us was made of unelaborate scraps of wood planks and was thin, there were no shelves, and the daily necessities were simply set to standing at the walls. The containers of berries, as well, were extremely primitive... more like, these were earthenware, were they.

"As far as I see, your level of living is... quite admirable, I must say?"

"You really pick your words... do you..."

"Nah, don't mention it!"

I had a feeling that going from this thatched-roofed dwelling to reaching the highest

intellectual cultures of the Earth would require time to be measured in the tens of thousands of years... but of course I was not going to say that.

"By the way, do you live here alone?"

"No, we have built a civilization, so I have friends. At the moment they are out for a bit of work."

"I see... then, besides this settlement... you have a country?"

"What's a 'country'?"

T-, they did not have the concept of 'country'?

"...please do not mind that. In other words, this culture took roots here, I see."

"No, that's actually not true."

Yameta-san's shoulders were lowered to begin with, and now slumped even further.

"Before coming here, we lived a little more to the North. Before even that, we lived far further to the North. We drifted and drifted and ended up chased in this remote place."

"And why is that?"

"Ah, that's a good question."

Yameta-san scratched himself around his cheeks with one paw, after which he suddenly began talking.

"...truth is, the war with the terrifying weasels has lasted many a year and still continues."

"A war?"

"Yes, we and them have been enemies forever. The history of our families is a history of battles where blood shed blood."

"Hah hah, you all got eaten?"

"That's not true. We have stood resolutely when faced with their invasions. Indeed, we bravely lifted our tails."

"You stand against them, but your opponent is your natural predator, is it not?"

"They're a formidable enemy. But we stride across the physical differences with the power of civilization."

"Civilization, you say, huh..."

Looking around inside the room I could guess the extent of that civilization.

"I get what you're trying to say. You're thinking that it's pretty shabby, right?"

"Well, to say it how it is, that is correct, still..."

"Truth is, we of the hamster species possess intelligence such that we could make our civilization reach much higher levels."

*We're the sole and only intelligent species after all*, Yameta-san said as he inflated his cheeks with the pride of a victor.

"That said, at present we are like this... and we can't do anything more than this, it's true."

In a corner of the room I could see a stone axe.

"That has impoverishment and exhaustion to blame. Because we have been fighting for many long years, we have lost land, we have lost food, and we have lost friends... if it wasn't for that, I believe we would have built a far larger settlement at this point."

"About how large is your population, if I may inquire?"

"Just until a while ago there were fifteen of us, but... right now..."

"Right now?"

Yameta-san stared fixedly at me with his round and cutesy eyes.

"...there are six of us."

"A significant decrease."

This was wildlife at risk of extinction (red list), was it not.

I see, so at present the hamsters have come down to that point, then...

"That face... you're contemptuous of us, are you?"

"No, really, I..."

I was merely pitying them.

"Very well then. It's top secret, but I'll make an exception and show you."

He hopped off his rock and beckoned me over.

"What is this about?"

After pointlessly inflating his cheek sack, Yameta-san said this with the pride of a victor on his face.

"...our supertechnology."

In the depths of the settlement was a particularly large residence, and I was being led there.

"The results of our superscientific technology are stored here. Come, get inside."

I followed him and entered inside, and at the center of a fairly large room for having a thatched roof I saw *that device* stored there.

"B-, but this is...!"

"That's right. Behold! What the collected wisdom of hamsters has created... the Heat Radiation Device!"

The device was covered by a transparent aerodynamic shell. In the cavity within, a jet black, long, and narrow thing was reverently hoisted from both sides, and I could guess it was an important part of the device that made up its kernel. Wires came out from its base, and they extended outwards, pointed towards the depths of the residence.

"Bwah!"

That was some... lightbulb.

"This is an incredible piece of technology that allows us to generate a light like the sun's even at night, and all on our power!"

"...I know."

"Eh, what did you say?"

"No, it is nothing." The thing was such that I was returning once more to Fairy Mode. "Ah. I do have one thing I would like to question, however!"

"As long as it's within what I can answer it's fine."

Yameta-san said that while proudly tugging at a whisker.

"Where did you take this thing from?"

"...uhm, are you listening to what I was saying? We developed this from zero, I mean..."

"Meaning you developed light bulbs on your own, unquote."

"Lightbulb...?"

"This is a bulb that uses the power of electricity to create light, correct? A bulb of light. Therefore, lightbulb."

"That is a nice one, really. Now that you say it, it's hard to get the others from the living room used to the word 'heat radiation device'. I'll be using that."

Well now, just, really.

...still, having created lightbulbs on their own was quite something.

"Well, I was making fun of all you hamsters, that I was."

"As long as you recognize that, that's fine."

Yameta-san felt embarrassed, perhaps, as he ran around in circles, chasing his own tail.

"Still, well done making a lightbulb, indeed... for rodents acting all important."

"R-, right there, I just felt a discriminatory nuance, have I?!"

"Ahhh, sorry. I misspoke 'rodents who are so important'."

"Why, that's what it was. Well, no need to go that far."

Yameta-san's face darkened, *but*, his words continued.

"...the one who developed that was the wisest among our race. However..."

"H-, however?"

"He made a delicious meal for an owl and died."

"He made a delicious meal, huh..."

This has become utterly Lost Technology. A lightbulb!

"This sword is his bequest."

Then Yameta-san shed tears as he took out from his back a rusted nail. It appeared he was always carrying it on his self.

"Bwah, you don't got guns I see... not yet."

That was why he got eaten. Chewed and chewed and then swallowed.

"Guns?"

"Nothing... please forget it."

Yameta-san faced back towards the lightbulb and delicately laid a paw on it.

"We will never give up. We are the only intelligent culture. If we progressed more with this sort of technology, I believe we could be able to live much more safely in this world ruled by the law of the jungle."

"Do please be careful not to go extinct before that, all right?"

"...we have no females anymore."

"That is bad."

Extinction was certain.

Now I was seriously pitying them.

"But more importantly, don't you want to see this lightbulb shine like the sun?"

"...ah, this thing, it turns on?"

"It does."

Yameta-san dragged in a large-scale external device hardwired to the lightbulb from the back of the house.

"B-, by using this... it will shine mightily and brightly."

"Oooh. I remember seeing this before."

To describe it, it was a contraption with something like a waterwheel suspended in midair. Correct... it was a running wheel for hamsters. The one to counteract their lack of physical exercise.

"Hahah, in short, it works like this. You get inside this wheel and make it spin, and that provides electricity to the lightbulb."

"Why, you're amazing! And you're not even a hamster. Yes, it's as you say. This is most intellectual sport that has been bequeathed by our race, the Perpetual Road, it's called."

"That name feels like it is the opposite of intellectual, somehow."

In particular the image of them repeating the same behavior endlessly, for example.

The memories of the era in which they had been raised as pets had stuck to their genes, maybe.

"It's used like this!"

Ignoring my perplexity, Yameta-san hopped into the wheel by himself, and began making it revolve round and round using his hindlegs.

Oooh, the pulley was turning...

Hamsters really have quick legs, do they. He was making that wheel rotate with tremendous

force.

"Ah, the light!"

Eventually, the lightbulb began emitting a weak light. I was honestly a little surprised that this lightbulb actually worked.

"F'mih?!"

Suddenly, Yameta-san slipped.

A fair bit of physical energy had been already poured in the rotating wheel, and so, naturally, it could not stopped merely by the 'widget' within taking a tumble.

Yameta-san was held down inside the wheel by centrifugal force, spinning in what was a result a vertical swing.

"Ham~~~!"

This all of him was like a pet animal's, and to an extent impossible to surpass.

Eventually, Yameta-san was blasted outwards, and fell on the floor with a splat.

"...please laugh at me."

Yameta-san said that laying face down.

"I will not, it was adorable."

"...I am grateful for your consideration..."

"And with that, we are hamsters, the hottest intelligent life forms around at the moment, pleased to meet you."

"Well, that will do."

We returned to the first house once more, and I had a second drop of water.

"So, you, who are capable of making conversations with us, just exactly who are you?"

"I belong to the species called humans."

"Human... you said that before as well. I've never heard of you."

"We are big and walk on two legs... you have never seen us?"

"We don't get close to large animals. Even if they don't have any hostility, we have had many a friend trampled and killed. Besides,"

Rub, he massaged the tip of his nose with both paws.

"You're tiny, you see?"

"Yeeeeah..."

Now just how could I explain in detail the situation in which I had been left in at present, hmmm?

Ahhh, right. First there was something that I absolutely needed confirmed, was there not.

"Ahhh, that is right. Setting aside the part about humans for a moment, are you aware of any place where fairies live?"

"Fairies, you say. Well, I have never heard of them, however."

"Never? Not even once? But their size is very similar to yours, and they resemble me..."

Yameta-san crossed his paws, thinking as he swayed slowly from side to side.

"...well, I have no memories of them."

He didn't know about the fairies?

But living in the woods meant that they shared the same living space, more or less...

"In the first place, you see," and he gave me eyes like big and round beads. "As far as species that could carry a conversation with us hamsters, at present there are only weasels and part of the birds."

"What did you say?"

"We can't speak with wolves or with fishes. We don't have contacts with big animals in the



first place, so we don't know. As far as beings around our size, you're the first."

"You cannot talk to bugs or the like?"

"We can't. We could talk at them, but all they do is pour out their instincts. Ah, do you eat sunflower seeds? I got some tasty ones."

"Mh-hm-mh..."

I sunk into thought.

Fairies not even taking contact with a species this interesting, was that even plausible?

"Ah, but there might be someone among my friends who knows. Once they return, how about trying to ask them—"

The door opened and four hamsters stumbled inside.

"What happened, my friends!" went Yameta-san.

The hamster that had the conspicuously largest body among the four shouted with a voice so feeble it did not suit his physique.

"Muhon's been eaten!"

A funeral was held.

It appeared that one of the six hamster's precious friends, the one called Muhon-san, had died. Cause of death was eating. The story went that Hamon-san had gone out to procure food, but incurred an attack from the weasels, their natural predator, and made for a most delicious lunch. The world of the Law of the Jungle was a tough one, truly.

Being that I also participated, I came to more or less help with the ceremony.

We all dug a hole and buried some of the departed's favorite things and bequests. I used the spoon in the stead of a shovel (it was just the right size) and participated to the digging of the hole.

Properly speaking the body would also have been interred in the hole, but sad to say the ceremony had to omit that.

The hamsters seemingly did not possess the concept of gravestones, as once they filled it with earth, nothing could be seen but a flat surface.

"...and with this only five remain. The countdown to extinction draws closer from one moment to the next."

One of the hamsters whispered words that ought never have been uttered.

The five attending all shivered, and a leaden raincloud hung over their heads.

The first to stand back up from the dark cloud was Yameta.

"Well, we can grumble about one of us being eaten all we like, it won't change anything. Let's stop moping."

The speed of Yameta-san's surrender was unusual.

"This has been on my mind for a while, so, this one... this... creature I have never seen before, what is it?"

Another hamster pointed at me.

"I don't really understand, but it seems to be a human. You can talk to them."

"...hi."

*Oooh*, went the stirring up of the place, and the four hamsters all at once began smelling my scent.

"...excuse me?"

"It doesn't seem like a bad one."

"You can tell that from scent?"

"We can."

That is right, they were animals...

"Then what's left to do is relax."

And with that, the four restlessly rushed in circles around the inside of the room with the pitter-patter of their four limbs.

An act like intelligence had suddenly left them.

Seeking an explanation I looked at Yameta-san, but he too was lost in washing his head.

"Yameta-san, could you please introduce me to everyone?"

"...licky licky licky..."

He was washing his head. My call was ignored.

"Hellooo?"

With a jolt of his body his motions stopped on the dot. There was a lengthy pause before I received any further reply.

".....what is it?"

"Did you just allow rationality to slip through your fingers?"

"It's a thing we do."

It appeared that the hamster species' intelligent behavior did not last unchanged for the whole twenty-four hours, they time and again lost their battle with instinct.

"So at the end of ends they are rodents..."

Lower class civilization for a lower class society, indeed, and their diving into a superiority complex was also for a brief space of time.

"...my Fairy Mode is also similar, I must say."

If I were to ridicule their behavior in the present situation, I would have rebounded in the exact same way as them. It was embarrassing.

"...do you eat sunflower seeds?"

As I was depressed, Yameta-san gave a slap at my back.

And so it was that I came to reside in the hamster Village.

I ate the same things at them, and I slept at the same time as them. This ought be called the most basic among basics of field work. To explain the highly interesting subject that was the appearance of civilization among the hamster species with sharp viewpoints and flexible thinking... there were no few things that could be gained via fieldwork.

Raw data. The voice of the present situation. Novel ideas. Safety of the self. Securing food, clothing, and shelter. Then, return to being human.

This quest for truth was a maelstrom of expectations. Including the desire to act for my self-interest.

The first few days passed quickly... or so it felt.

While I understand that I am phrasing it in vague ways, it was because I could not quite grasp the passage of any number of days.

After all, it was difficult to separate between night and day in an environment deep within the woods. It was often dark even during the day, and conversely there were nights bright from the moonlight.

Therefore, I considered one sleeping and waking cycle as one day.

With the hamster Village as starting point, I continued my search for the fairies day after day.

With three berries on my back for lunch.

I kept a nail on myself as defensive weapon.

The latter I had borrowed from the things left behind by the late Hamon-san. It was a brand new nail with no rust, it was quite of good quality (and that was a bad omen).

I could do nothing about cats or foxes or other large carnivores, but if faced with a centipede or a snake, then... well, it was there just for my peace of mind.

The hamster race did not know about the fairies.

Which meant that I had to find the fairies by myself, and that was why I came to scurry about alone at the bottom of the woods.

The support of the hamster Village required compensation.

Which was, should I ever find a female hamster anywhere, I had to bring her back. Their Village was at this point a family of only men, finding a female was for their race a matter of life or death.

As far as terms, they were quite favorable.

Ideally I wished to borrow their paws, however I of course could not request that much.

The Village was at present under construction to turn it into a fortress.

The hollow of a dead tree functioned as natural rampart. As the entrance was small, the invaders were limited to being about ten centimeters of size, therefore it should be possible even for them to deal with it.

That said, the shock of losing one of their friends had made them more vigilant, and at present the conversion into a fortress was advancing at rapid speeds.

An impact like a stone had struck me reached me through the helmet on top of my head. That was no stone, it was a massive drop of water that had hit me from a high place.

"Oh dear... is it raining?"

In this land we were familiar with sudden downpours.

I had worn on my head a new eggshell that I had acquired, but it did not make for a replacement for an umbrella.

If this were to last long the soil could turn into a slimy mud flow, meaning I needed to be vigilant even about a brief bit of rain. With the height I had, it was possible that even a little water could make for a dangerous flooded area.

I decided to take shelter from the rain, so I hopped on top of the protruding root of a tree.

The rain kept falling.

Having become small changed even the impression the rain left by quite a bit.

The rain drops were the huge size of my fists. They fell one by one, then shattered.

As far as sound, it was a thunderous roar that reminded me of a landslide, and the vibration of the streaks of pouring rain striking the ground became tremors that reached me all the way to the knees.

This was not quite a situation in which small birds and insects, who possessed keen sensors, could work, indeed.

Countless lives all through the whole of the woods were, same as I was, resting in a temporary truce, that was the feeling I had.

But there were those who worked even in the rain.

"Look there, a frog."

Beyond the intense misty spray of the falling rain there sat a frog of a beautiful vivid green. My hearing must have been lost in the sound of the rain, as I seemingly had not noticed that it was approaching.

The frog was staring fixedly at me with eyes that were big, but did not have sentiment to them. Its size was one larger than mine, with a body length of around 11-12 centimeters. I put my hand to my back, and unhurriedly drew my nail from its scabbard made of grass wrapped around it.

Surely it was not thinking of making prey of something nearly its size...

Our staring at each other went for some time. The frog left with slow motions.

"Well now?"

It must have been the smoke-like spray of the rain.

And did the frog really walk by standing on two legs as it left...?

"Ridiculous."

I could no longer see the frog.

If I had been able to converse with them as well, I could ask them where the fairies lived – I thought of chasing it, but as it would have been annoying if it all ended fruitlessly, in the end my legs did not move.

First of all, I right now possessed fairy eyes.

Looking at things with the eyes of the fairies, I could converse with hamsters and pillbugs. I was unable to view straight pillars as they were, and the more things went towards their peak, the more I saw them twisted.

They were lens-like eyes. Like they were re-explaining the world via sight–

I looked up, and found that the trees surrounding me twisted softly like candy in the far distance, coming back together in a shape like they were utterly missing the central disk. They reminded me of a deeply mysterious Celtic knot pattern. And also of a geometrical figure.

I believed that the way I saw when I was human was correct.

But was it truly so?

What if it was this gaze that was correct?

What if the real aspect of the world was this one?

"Sigh..."

I exhaled a sigh.

I had this feeling like there was nothing in the world that was inexplicable.

What if in truth the fairies did not exist, and at present, due to some circumstance, I merely had a discrepancy in my memories and was actually a hamster... no, no, no, that sort of *It Was All A Dream* ending would never happen, I believe.

"Rain."

The voice right behind my back made me leap up by twenty centimeters.

"Who is it?!"

My request for identity was hollowly swept away by the misty rain.

My ears, which were examining the surroundings without carelessness, were reached by a low whispered voice that once again said, "rain".

"...really, who goes there?"

The owner of the voice was nowhere to be found. I could not see them.

I held my breath and made my gaze run about the surroundings, and eventually all around me gradually filled with a countless number of low voices all echoing the word "rain".

The words scattered about here and there in dots were of a single term.

Like the raindrops that never fell simultaneously, the voices whispering *rain* were certainly not an unison.

"...rain."

"...rain..."

"Rain."

"Rain....."

".....rain..."

"...rain....."

"Are those... the voices of the plants?"

What made me think that was how there was no emotion whatsoever in those voices.

They were dispassionate, they were inorganic, they resembled the supple sound emitted by the blades of grass wet by the rain, they made me think of the more mechanical workings of nature. They were the voices of joy of the grass and the trees bathed all at once by the beads of rain. Or maybe, the simple sounds of the woods absorbing rain was being translated like that by my fairy ears. Whichever it was, it was a magnificent experience.

Even the plants, which had no words, spoke eloquently to tiny ears. The fact of the viewpoint of the world being not the same was thrust at me.

I had the feeling that I was able to touch if for a little bit the mysteries implicit in all things.

I was tired of it. Of searching for the fairies.

And also of spiritual things like experiencing the mysteries of all things through their eyes and ears.

The instant the safety of their lives was insured people became self-indulgent, a warning of which I had become a living example, as I was at present completely lost in filing down my fingernails using a serrated stone (in the stead of a rasp).

"A sunflower seed."

I tried making a request to the void.

"They're all gone."

"But there were so many...?"

As I blew on my fingernails I tried requesting a second time, but Yameta-san uttered something preposterous.

"We got a food shortage. We're going to have to live on a single one per day."

My gaze shifted to him for the first time.

"...what did you say?"

"That you've been devouring them one after another, human, and so they're all gone."

"But you see, this is a civilized society, right?"

"There were several places where we could gather berries, and we went around them in turns. But eventually, several of them were taken over by the weasels."

"To see the influence of fighting even this far..."

"With things like this. we have to think about moving again..."

"This is serious, is it not."

As the fortification of the Village was continuing, he had to have been sincere, indeed.

The hole was sealed with a large stone, and a fence of dried branches with thorny shrubs weaved into it was laid on its interior side, meaning the settlement was set to hold down a siege. The mood was really serious.

I had never seen a weasel, so for the moment I could not really feel danger.

"But as long as you had a sufficient food, you could just remain holed up, however."

"...sufficient food."

An idea had come to the surface.

"There is just no place where you can find lots of edibles just laying scattered about, is there?"

"You never tried going to the a human dwelling, correct?"

"Human dwelling?"



"...does not look like it."

I had the inhabitants of the Village gather. All five.

I explained the plan, and the hamsters looked at each other's faces.

Yameta-san took one step forwards and raised a hand as if saying he had a question.

"In other words, in this land called 'vegetable patch' there are many things to eat?"

"That is correct."

Another hamster came forwards. I basically could not distinguish them, so it was possible that this one was Yameta-san, but do not worry about that, please.

"What kind of food is there?"

I gave a serious thought back to the conversation I had exchanged with the Eggs Lady far in the past.

"I am sure... that there are carrots."

"An excellent treat to eat before dying." "...shut up." "We all gotta do our best so it won't end like that." "If that place is so good, I'd say we should actually move our nest there, how about?"

The hamsters made a circle and exchanged opinions.

"...what do you think about that, human?" went Yameta-san.

"That land is open-spaced, and whatever else, there are many giants there... it might be difficult to live there permanently."

"Giants?"

"How big are we talking?"

"There are some over ten times your sizes."

That very moment, the hamsters lost it.

"T-, that big? Isn't it dangerous?"

"They are of gentle character, truly, there is no fear that they will attack like the weasels. It is just that if we are discovered taking their vegetables, things might get a little hairy. Therefore we need to act with care."

And so it was that an expedition to my hometown was decided. One must hurry towards virtue, it is said. I was to go with, as I had gotten a little more feeling for the land than before, and work as guide towards the hometown. It was going to be a long voyage that would take a whole day and night.

"We should see the vegetable patch if we go beyond that hill!"

Although the impression it gave was different, I did feel like I was walking on land I was accustomed to.

When we arrived at the summit of the hillock, we could pass our gazes downwards over the massive vegetable patch.

"So that's what it is. That's some strange land there."

It was inevitable that Yameta-san, who had never seen a vegetable patch, would express his impression of them.

"Sniff sniff, I smell food." "I can't see any of those giants." "That's some strange land..."

It did not seem like they would be concealing their hesitation at seeing the Village of men for the first time.

It might have all come down to me holding a firm command of these troops.

And still, what we were about to do now was straight up stealing.

"Lady... I apologize deeply. This is all for survival."

We were not going to steal everything. We were going to help ourselves to just a little.

The lady was kind, so I was sure she was going to forgive us... and in the event I returned to being a human, I will make some tasty sweets and bring them to her. Just for now, just for the time being—

"I give you my sincerest apologies!"

The band of thieves charged the vegetable patch.

The carrots that were in the garden of the lady were all round and plump.

As the vegetables grown by humans had been selected through long years of cross-breeding, they were far sweeter and larger than the ones growing in the wild. As far as knowledge I did understand that, however... I could not really feel any thankfulness for that.

That was until I saw these attractive carrots.

"...you can tell they're tasty just by looking at them..."

Yameta-san did not hide his enthusiasm as he trembled.

"How appropriate for a last supper... I expect they will be a delicacy." "I feel like flying..." "My front teeth are aching..." "I'm digging in!"

With a shouted *all right!* the band of thieves scattered throughout the vegetable patch.

We ripped up everything from one end to the other, and the harvest... in the sense of stolen goods we tied up one after another with ivy grass.

With enough momentum to rip up the entire field, forget just a part of it.

"Piii! Isn't this a super harvest?!"

I eventually let reason go, and became a creature completely obsessed with the act of excavating the soil with the spoon.

"Why you damn raaaAAAAAAATS!"

An angry voice I had never heard before descended from the height of the heavens.

"?!"

The event was such that the five animals plus one petrified, and were unable to react properly.

A giant built like a mountain rushed over with stomping footsteps. At a speed hard to believe. What else could that have been but a human. A fairy's eyes saw them as nothing but gray giants, but... she had clothes I remember seeing somewhere... right, this was the Eggs Lady, was it not.

A human seen from a size of ten centimeters felt like a preposterous cataclysm.

Seeing a mountain running would make anyone abandon their powers of reason, right?

Right then, that was how it felt like.

"We gotta run! Guys, it's a human! A human is coming!"

Shouting words that a normal human would rarely utter, I shouldered carrots joined together like prayer beads and set out to run. Even the hamsters, who had frozen in fear, followed after me after a delay.

"Ch'wuuu!" went Yameta-san.

Perhaps due to the fear, he was utterly dominated by his wild blood.

"Stop iiiiiiit, you damn thieving raaaaaaats! If I catch you, I'll make you into a piiiiie!"

The resolute voice of the human chasing us hammered our backs.

Ah, could it be, was that the Eggs Lady?

That mild-mannered person turned into a demon like this?!

"Ch'wuuuuuuuuuuuuu?!"

"Piiiiiiiiiiiiii?!"

Thump, something fell down right at our side.

It was a massive boulder.

The lady was aiming at us as she threw stones.  
"Nooooo!"  
If that thing struck home I was going to die!  
My head went blank as I ran.  
The Law of the Jungle was harsh. That was what I thought. But it was not only that.  
The society of men was also harsh—  
We were sobbing as we ran about, trying to escape.  
"I'll bake you into a piiiiiiiie!!!"  
That gruff voice chased us everywhere, just every which way.

By the time we had returned to the hamster settlement, we were physically dead tired.  
Chased by the lady we scattered, and although we managed to keep our lives somehow, we could no longer tell where we were... relying on scenes and scents that we remembered we spent several days wandering, and at last we managed to come back home.

"I-, I have returned~..."  
Using the spoon as walking stick I showed up at the house we used for gatherings.  
"Ah, it's the human! You're in one piece!"  
"Guys, I am so glad, you are all here I see!"  
I saw faces I had longed to see all in a row.  
One, two, three, four—  
"Uhm, we are missing one, what is that about?"  
The four lowered the tips of their noses, depressed.  
"...he did not make it back." Yameta-san's voice was shivering.  
"Then... he was caught and baked into a pie...?"  
"That, or smashed by a rock..."  
The mood in the room became even gloomier.  
"He was such a nice guy..."  
One of them began bawling in misery. The remaining ones, even in their silence, seemed to be of the same feeling. A deep sadness filled my surroundings. Yameta-san clapped his hands.  
"Come now, let's stop brooding. What is gone is to be given up."  
"That's right, that's the right thing." "We should completely forget about him."  
Awww, how little did this species value life.  
"In the end they are but rodents... right."  
"Did you say something?"  
"No, nothing."  
"More importantly, human, the carrots from back then, the majority we had to leave behind, but we did carry home a few."  
On the desk there was an imposing carrot, with signs that it had been chewed through here and there. They seemed to be right in the middle of supper.  
"A raw carrot..."  
While I did not think highly of it, I allowed instinct to guide me and bit into it, and what an indescribably soft sweetness spread in my mouth.  
"This is truly the flavor of happiness!"  
"It's delicious. I've never had anything this delicious to eat..." Yameta-san's eyes looked far in the distance. "But that giant was scary. First time I've seen a creature that scary."  
"...I'm sorry."

I apologized in the stead of humanity.

"Ah, but you see! Not all giants are evil. In the house right next to that vegetable patch there lives a very kind lady, you know."

"...is that true?"

"Indeed, the giants are not all bad people."

"That'd be good to hear... but whatever the reason, I don't think we'll go to that land ever again."

That would be so, true. It was quite the frightening experience indeed.

"Regardless, with this we can hold a siege for a while. Everybody do your best!"

"Yeeeah!"

The chorus was of a single voice.

And so it was that we, while grieving for our friend (as well as forgetting about him), continued to chew into the carrot.

The low sound of a torrential rain striking the ground echoed throughout the world. Even thunder rolled from somewhere in the distance, and made it clear that this was a far more serious rainfall than the shower of a few days before. The sound of the rain may well be called a roaring, but what reached me from the soil, alongside a tingle, invited sleep.

I was sleeping soundly in my own home, surrounded by tree leaves and straw.

What broke that pleasant sleep was the shrill resounding of warning bells (empty cans).

"W-, what 's it? whass'up?"

I lifted myself up in half Fairy Mode, pointlessly fidgeting about with the dried leaf blanket with one hand.

Yameta-san rushed into the house.

"They're here! The accursed ones are here! It's an attack!"

"The accursed ones... wha-, we are being attacked?"

"The rain is falling hard, so we didn't notice that they were moving the stone that covers the entrance! And then they entered through the main entrance!"

"From that tiny hole?"

"The weasels are inside! Once they fit their head in they slip through with the rest! That's the kind of beasts they are!"

I could hear the screams of the hamsters outside.

"If the fence is broken it's all over! We gotta forget it all and run!"

"A-... am I in danger too? I am not a hamster, though..."

I had to apologize, I had in fact given a thought at saving myself alone.

"The weasels enjoy the hunt! They won't care if you're a different species!"

"Ngh..."

They enjoyed the hunt. I was surprised to find that a wild animal had thoughts that wicked. But in a world where pillbugs spoke and hamsters held funerals, that may also have been plausible.

"You do have an actual escape route, right?"

Before thinking whether we'll face them or we'll be stuck here, the first thing I wanted to confirm was that.

So long as we had a rear exit that would allow us to escape without being discovered by the enemy when push came to shove...

"We don't."

"EeeEGH!"

I ended up screaming out.

"Why?!"

"Because we've got nothing but the one hole that opens towards here to begin with."

"Then I really wish you had made one!"

The hamster dazedly thought for a moment, then clapped his hands.

"Noticing that now is waaaaaay too late!"

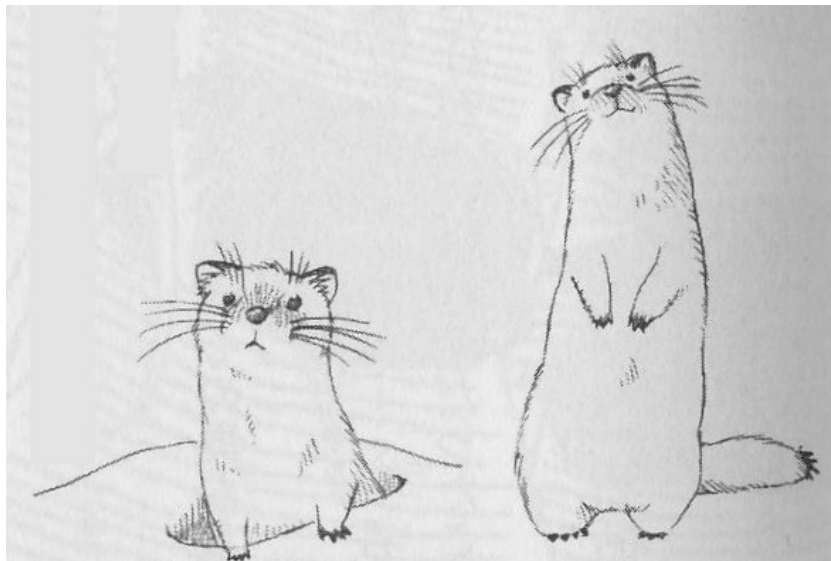
We held our nails tightly as we left the house to go see how things were going.

We passed through the square and went up to near the fence, finding three more hamsters headed in the same direction with nails held out. I shot my gaze out to where they were pointing at – and saw them.

There was an army of weasels.

Generally speaking, what image do people have of the animal known as the weasel?

It has to be this (DRAWING OF WEASEL STANDING) or this (DRAWING OF WEASEL POKING HIS HEAD FROM A SNOW HOLE), correct?



Left: DRAWING OF WEASEL POKING HIS HEAD FROM A SNOW HOLE

Right: DRAWING OF WEASEL STANDING

A truly cute and adorable animal. Spindlier if compared to dogs, soft paws of the same length that made one think their physiques as humorous.

However, that was all a deception.

Anyone who had become ten centimeters tall and faced with the weasels would understand that.

That was how cruel growing in the wild was. Even if a news crew covering the activities of wild animals living in that wild kingdom happened to be present there, they would definitely never help you. The reason was that "*people cannot safely intervene in the Laws of the Wild (narration)*" would come first and foremost, and the rest, no matter how much they insisted it was 'documenting', would be a normal shoot with profit in mind (this may perhaps be obvious, but I was slightly confused).

The weasels reminded me of a swarm of the dead.

They had a vertical standing stance, their eyes were clouded with a darkish will to kill, their sharp claws were coming out from around their chests.

"Th-, they... are much too menacing, are they?"

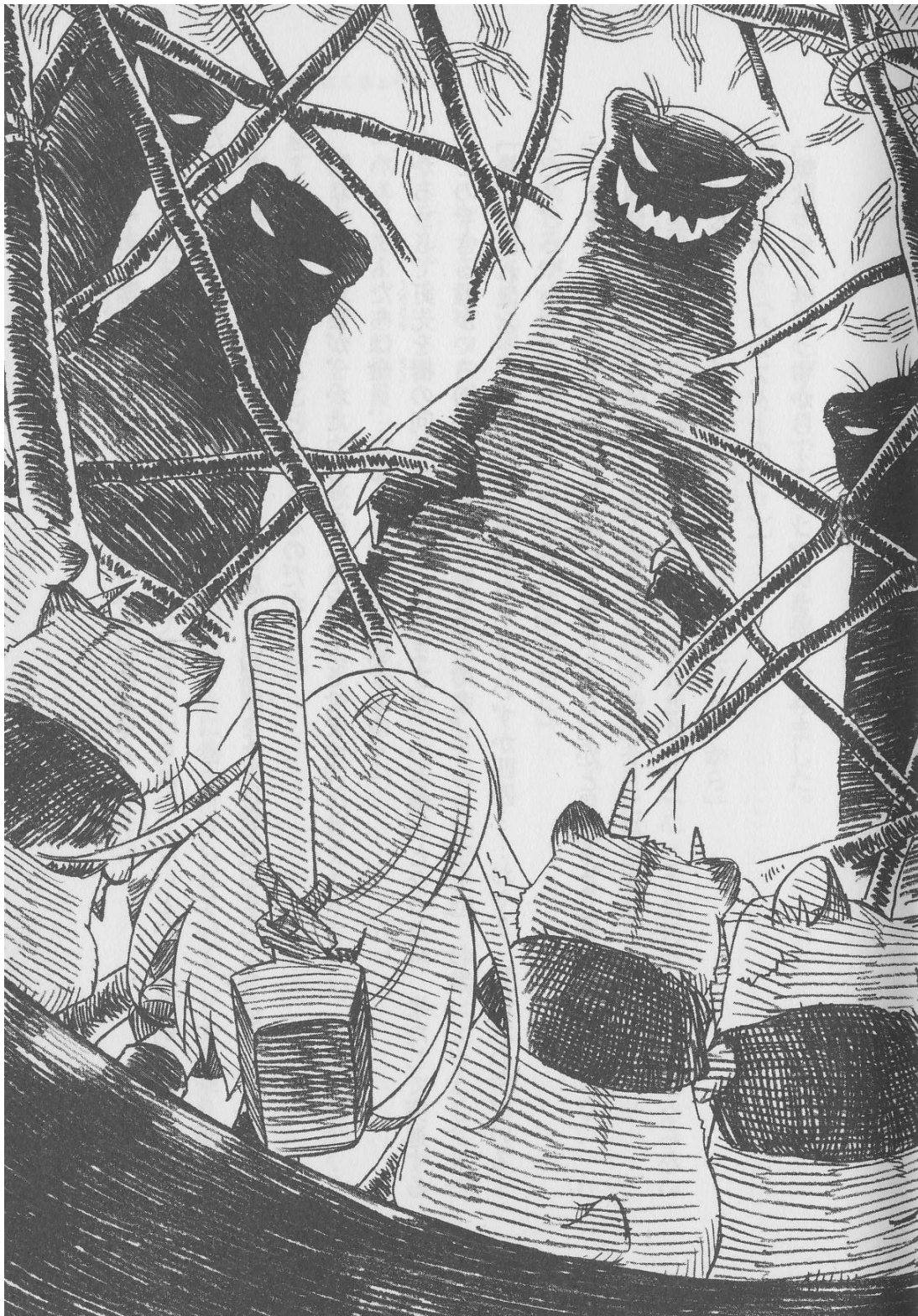
"R-, right?"

There were a total of ten weasels. They were holding a reliable, single horizontal file on the other side of the fence. From behind them, a larger weasel broke the file and took one step forwards.

When it stood up, it felt like the height he had was nearly five times mine... this was the boss of the gang, that could be realized at a glance. Most easily because he, along among the ten weasels, had white fur. The fact on the contrary gave him an almost evil presence.

The white weasel calmly looked around the settlement, made a wicked smile, then spoke with a warm and friendly tone.





"Well well well, my filthy little hamsters. Today is to be remembered."

None returned words. An instinctive fear that said that we shouldn't catch his gaze by responding dominated us all.

"And the reason why is that we can observe the end of your kin... as we kill you one by one, plucking off every tiny bone."

His roundabout words conversely multiplied the terror.

The hamsters all were shuddering.

They did manage to point the nails towards the fence, if barely, but it was dubious whether there was a single one among them that would charge when the time to fight came.

"In the beginning you had so many little friends, but now are a mere four... and what's this?

There's someone here I've never seen before. How come you don't look like a hamster?"

The ruby-colored pupils that the white weasel had fixed straight onto me.

A special interest was visible on them.

As a member of Former Humanity, we who once stood at the peak of the food chain, I was at that point in the position of having to say something.

"...ch'wuh?" (Imitating a hamster.)

"There's no point... there's no point at all, human..."

Yameta-san shook my shoulder with sad eyes.

"Ch'wuh?"

"You can imitate hamsters if you want, but you'll only be killed together with us."

"T-, that is true! Awww, I was so confused, I was...!"

The white weasel didn't seem to have any interest in sketch comedy, as he snorted in displeasure.

"Well, it doesn't matter. The mice may have increased by one unknown, but nothing whatsoever has changed. On the contrary, I might say that the fun has increased by one little creature."

He was ready to kill indeed, this weasel.

I had been turning my head about for a while, searching for a way to escape, however I found that I had no bright ideas.

"Yameta-san, that fence... how robust is it?"

The fence had been built with quite the hustle behind it, it was taller than the weasels were, and its mesh was tight.

Though the weasels had slid in through the narrow entrance, they would not be able to pass through the fence's other holes.

Even if they clambered over it, the sharp, thorny shrubs were wound on it like barbed wire, and it did not seem quite likely that they could overcome it.

"...who knows, it's never been tested, so..."

Blood had drained from his face, and I could tell that he was frozen down to the bottom of his heart.

It was completely hopeless, those were the accurate words that this situation yet made me hesitate to even say. I felt an unease sort of like a spell, one that said that if I were to utter those words, I would have to confront a reality I did not want to look straight at.

"Excuse me, if possible, I would like to be excluded from this...?"

"I get what you're feeling, but... you'd better give it up."

"I do not wish to give up!"

If only our opponent was just one, then scattering and running away could possibly save us.

"Think, just think, me... at the very least I must think all the way through... and then cause a

miracle to happen, like the protagonists that often appear in make-believe stories that always hang on a chance of one percent or less."

I took a stance with the nail in one hand and the spoon in the other, and gave myself up to thinking.

"Human...?"

Yameta-san's mustache was twitching up and down in worry, and I announced this to him.

"Should we really give up at this point...? A miracle... we can cause a miracle to happen... as long as we do not give up a miracle will happen. I am sure that the divine protection of God truly exists!"

For the time being, I said something proactive. To direct the activities of God (if He exists).

"Well now, enough prayers. Hang on to that nonexistent hope, if you want to. And then freeze all the way down to your last drop of blood in a dread beyond all salvation! But never forget one thing. The unexpected helping hand of Good extended towards pitiful sacrifices trapped by powers beyond their measure is, in the end, nothing more than the delusional cliché (meaning of hackneyed) of the weak!"

...was this loquacious and vocabularily skilled weasel guy really an animal? Well?

In this carnivorous world that yet still belonged to the Marchen I wished we could be saved from this *I'm gonna eatcha*♪ by friendly creatures coming from the woods.

The true Law of the Jungle was harsh...

Sigh, everything felt like a bad dream... that was what I wanted to think with all my strength. That this was a dream. And that I would wake right away.

"Now then, filthy hamsters. You are convinced that this fence will effectively prevent our invasion, but... heh heh heh, I see, it's quite well done. Very well thought, for having teensy brains that aren't even the size of a claw's nail. However—"

The brown-furred underling weasels all simultaneously made thin smiles, then extended their claws.

"We will shatter it in a single STROKE!"

The white weasel swiped horizontally, and the fence was all too easily torn apart. There was no need for them to overcome it. For that white weasel beyond all standards, the thorny shrubs might as well have been no threat.

The weasels rode in from one to the next through that tear opened wide.

"Come, let us feast, little things! We will enjoy killing you as slowly as we please!"

They're here they're here they're here!

"Miracle! MIRACLEEE! A convenient miracle that treats us like protagonists!!!"

I stabbed with both the nail and the spoon, shouting out to the limits of my voice.

Perhaps my wish came true, perhaps it was the guidance of Fate, if not then I was being treated like a protagonist.

Clack—

That number that was engraved on the handle of the spoon, through some mechanism I did not understand, miraculously increased from 31 to 32.

"....."

That was all.

"That is iiiiiit?!"

The weasels in attack mode turned into slow-motion, clad in a dramatized yet elegant simplicity.

"Ahahah, we're finished, are we!"

Yameta-san said that in an oddly cheerful tone.

My eyes had already given up on living.

"Dying's so strange, isn't it, human."

"And I am telling you that giving up is no good!"

"This living thing, well, it might just be nothing more than one kind of uninterrupted sequence of phenomena that pervade the world... thought that like that, it's not so scary."

"Having a revelation now is no goooooood!"

The four hamsters were ready to run at any moment. They were just about to toss away the nail that made for their only weapon, scatter, and run away. However, as the entrance was blocked by the weasels, there was no hope for salvation no matter where they ran. They could only cling close to the wall, huddled with each other, shivering.

The inside of the hole was suddenly scorched by an intense light, and that was when it happened.

"What's going on?!"

The weasels lost their composure. With a bit of a delay, there thundered the sharp sound of paper being torn apart.

A thunderstrike. And one that appeared to have fallen right nearby. The weasels' gazes wandered. From the viewpoint of a beast, it was impossible for them to not be anxious about a fire.

"We got a teensy bit more life. It's a good bargain."

Yameta-san said that like it did not concern him. Fear might have long since paralyzed him, as he was making a satisfied face. So watching people who give up too quickly makes them look this pitiful, I see. I have to be careful about that, too... if I survive this.

"It has to be now..."

It happened when I was about to suggest that we take advantage of the confusion. Though no one was touching it, part of the wall had collapsed and a hole had opened. It was a tiny thing of about five-six centimeters.

After that, a hamster wet to his fur showed his face.

"Is that you?!"

The one we thought had been sacrificed when we went on the hunt for carrots... his name... his name I had not asked, but he was the one we thought had died!

"Fernandez! You were still alive!"

So he had that pointlessly noble a name, I saw.

"Guys, we can escape from here... we can run away!"

*Yeah!*, and the hamsters' faces shone with hope as they jumped into the hole one after another. I came last.

"You gotta hurry, human!"

"Y-, yes!"

I tossed the nail on the spot, shouldered just the spoon, and pushed myself into the hole, as well. At the edge of my sight I could see the white weasel rushing forwards. We had been noticed!

"You ain't going anywhere!"

I could feel the white weasel closer and closer on my back. It was to cry.

"Hyhn!"

I flapped my limbs as hard as I could, but the hole was too big and my behind would not come out of it.

"Human, hurry up and get on this side!"

"I-, I got to get unstuck..."

"Toss away that spoon!"

"It got stuck and it will not come off!"

The hamsters pulled me, but there was no sign my posterior would get unstuck.

"Human, you cannot be telling me that..."

"That is not true!" I was calm. "I have absolutely not gotten fat from munching on sunflower seeds," I lied.

"You did nothing but eat and sleep!"

I could no longer see him, but I could tell the white weasel was standing behind me. He had an intense bloodlust. He was angry that what he thought he had caught up to had run away.

"You tricky little hamster, I'm gonna tear you apart!"

A claw was swung out directed at my behind.

"Forget me! Just run!"

I decided to resign and accept that it was The End for me.

Humanity Has Declined ~ The End

The 857<sup>th</sup> Cooking Hell's Mansion Light Novel Prize has invited applications up until the last day of September \*\*\*\*. There were many participants. We are very thankful. We are now carrying out judgment, which will be merciless even if seen with the eyes of an outsider, and—

I had abandoned myself to a chaos that led me into an alternate dimension when a stiff sound came from the side with my behind.

"Huh?"

In an instant, my body went *shpop* like a champagne cork and slipped through, tumbling out into the torrential rain as surrounded by the hamsters.

"Oooh?"

There had to have been some impressive strength at work, as we were blown off with quite the force. For a moment we took a flight during which we remained all huddled together, but we gradually separated in midair and scattered about like a snowball that wasn't compacted well enough.

"Humaaan! If fate says it, then we will meet again—"

Yameta-san's voice and figure were both growing distant.

"Yeah, Yameta-saaan, keep yourself in good heeealth!"

It was a time of partings.

What a day today had been. I sincerely thought that as I glided through the air.

...it looked like I had lost consciousness for a while.

I was hanging from a nail planted in a tree trunk like I was some dangling mascot.

Also, the tree was burning.

"HYYYH!"

I struggled, and all that happened was that the string that I used to shoulder the spoon got entangled, so I escaped right away. It was an easy landing from a height of about five centimeters.

"Was I saved...?"

It looked like the tree was the one who took a direct streak of lightning earlier. To get crucified on that spot, truly... if it had not been raining, right now I might have suffocated to death from the smoke.

I was just barely saved and I was about to die immediately afterwards.

Now that I said it, how was I able to escape from the peril that was being skewered posterior-first?

When I thought back, the shrill sound of receiving a claw's attack still remained in my ears.

"Ahhh, it was because I had the spoon?"

It seem that the literal spoon section of the spoon I shouldered was covering my posterior, and acted as a shield. The might of that one attack popped me out of the hole, and here we were.

"...I gotta run..."

If I did not act right away I might be discovered by the weasels. Thinking that, I began walking.

And then I fell into a river.

"Piiliiii! It's one thing after anotheeeeeeeer!"

It was, of course, inundated due to the torrential rain. I had no say in the matter as the strength of the current tore me off from the riverbed and carried me off to someplace my feet could not touch the bottom of.

"...aBlrgh..."

Water entered my mouth, and in my mind the words *The End* began flickering. It was the sign that spelled death.

Sigh, what kind of death would be the easiest, I wonder. Cooking, disease, blood loss, falling,



suffocation, drowning, ran over, burning... there were many causes of death, however only one could be experienced in this world.

Personally I believe that freezing to death might have been nice, might it not? I heard that the death is like sleeping. Death by cooking would be the worst! It was definitely a way of dying I did not wish for. That being said, I must add that drowning would not be a good thing either, do mind... my consciousness had gotten far away. Well then my dear audience, sayonara.

My body was dragged down by the rushing waters and quietly sunk beneath the surface.

I met eyes with a frog. A frog?

On the other side of the slightly dark underwater I saw a frog swimming. It caught my hand, and with force enough that I could not feel the opposition from the rushing flow, dragged me up to a hill.

"T-, thank you very much~."

I ejected the mass of water that had slipped in from the edges of my mouth. I happened to hear that there was such a thing as a lethal dose of water, as well, but that also aside, I had quite about had enough with being saved in so many ways.

The frog stretched up his back and stood imposingly on his two legs. This was nothing I ought say after being saved, but I saw him as quite handsome. Mr. Frog then said this.

"Myyy, dear lady, today we have a tremendously fine rain, do we?"

".....he spoke."

"In a day like this, we feel our spirits raised up high, or don't we?"

"Huh?"

That statement of unclear meaning made with no hesitation at all made me lose my nerve a little.

"Oh dear, this is rude of me. I'm still wearing my raincoat, am I?"

And then the frog, starting from the top of the head, smoothly and swiftly opened with a mechanism like a toolbox opens from both sides, splitting up left and right.

"....."

I witnessed with calmness this bizarre event. Today so many things had happened that my heart and mind felt numb. I could accept any sort of chaotic thing at that point. At that moment, I was chaos itself.

The frog split – and now then, what about the very interesting contents?

I glanced in and was startled, taken aback.

"What? A hu-, human?"



Inside the frog was a human(?), tall, slender, and with well-proportioned features. They had a face that made it hard to tell whether they were male or female. They were tremendously beautiful. No, there was no possible way this could be a human. But if they were a fairy, they would have been more cutesy and round, I believed... and so, what creature was this?

"W-, who might you be?"

"Well, I haven't thought much about that, you see?"

A beautiful face that felt drawn with a G nib or a round nib said, and with a light voice like he was reciting a poem, something that felt a little foolish and nostalgic.

"Could you... be perhaps... a fairy?"

The fairy(?) smoothly leaned forwards. Their face approached, and eyes clear like the flowing water of a lake poured their gaze onto me with very visible interest. I, like a hamster being glared at by a weasel, could only shrink into myself and shiver.

Eventually the fairy(?) made a relaxed smile and said this with a relaxed tone.

"I do have the feeling that I used to be one."

Though they differed in looks, and were oddly gentlemanly in their speech, I thought that he absolutely had to be a fairy.

I was invited to the fairy's Village.

Carried by a wooden crate used as elevator, we reached the canopy part of the forest at around twenty meters of height. A canopy was the thicket of foliage at the top of woods and forests. As sunlight always shone on it, the leaves were not only growing well, they were pleasantly warm, and being blessed by the passage of wind and by rain too, it was the place of winners in the great game of forests.

A height of around twenty meters should have been its own fair thing even with a normal body, but having become a morsel's size, I felt it as being three hundred meters or more.

What was unexpected was that a variety of creatures lived in the canopy.

I could see insects and birds and the likes everywhere. Their variety did nothing but surprise me, in particular how the smaller creatures seemed to be the most active. Just by having so many resources and energy, as a result it made this place apparently easy for fairies to live in.

The construction of this village was eccentric.

Houses made from carved-out pumpkins were here and there, bridges of suspended vines and wood floored corridors were randomly hung every which were. Elevators with wooden boxes suspended by vines were installed in every location, and where the protruding branches were particularly robust, round planks of three or more meters of diameters were set and utilized as plazas.

It was also replete with facilities. For example the animal zoo, or rather the insect zoo, was popular, and there was a large crowd day after day to see ladybugs, pillbugs, fleas, and the like.

The bustle of a festival came at any time and in every place, smiles and laughs were incessant, like an Eden on Earth... no, on the Trees.

The population was certainly not large. One, two hundred people. It did not seem like it would surpass the five hundred at most. That low population was the reason why this seemed calm for a fairy settlement.

What determined the gathering of people was whether the place was fun or not.

This was a truly fun world, however, whatever else it was elevated and did not seem to attract eyes, so as a result it had only developed up to this pleasant level, or so went my conjecture.

Also, the frog suit seemed to be the clothes for rainy days. They were the latest fad.

You could search and search for them, but you would likely never find these fairies. And so, the matter of the spoon. I promptly went around the settlement and asked, but then... "Never seen it before." "Never seen it." "Never ever seen it." "Never seen it to begin with." "Never-ever seen it." "Seen it times nil." "I'd rather say I'd seen it but I won't lie." "By the way, what's this?"

Information: none whatsoever. Ways to solve this: none. That was the result with which it all ended. It was thinkable that the one who built this was not here in the first place. He was a different specimen off in some distant place. I was at a loss.

The searchability of the fairies' cultural society was way too low! (Formal complaint.)

I made my decision.

"I will give it up (smile)."

This was a peaceful land.

Unshackled by the fetters and the Law of the Jungle of down on the ground, every day had the fun bustle of a festival, and thanks to sweets that had been gathered who knows where from, there was no worry for food, either. Compared to the Hamster Age, this was a remarkably improved standard of living. Food came even when I remained quiet. This scene had a good outlook.

"I should just live here forever, should I not. Right?"

And so I decided to live away my time with this fictional optimism.

After all, the other fairies also spent all day playing. It was not just me. And so it was going to be all right. Still, this was a flight from reality. I understood that...

Being full of handsome guys it initially put me under quite some pressure, however, mysteriously, I now felt little difference in sex between me and them. I got used to it right away. It was easy to live, it was easy to live with. A marvelous kingdom.

I played tag, I played hide-and-seek.

I played with balls, I sang, and I danced.

When I was hungry I ate sweets.

The most thrilling game was the sliding that used an ivy ropeway. The game consisted in holding to a specialized pulley hung on a stretch of vine to cross to the opposite tree. In the beginning it was so terrifying that I only shuddered at it, but as there was a net set up below and everything was well connected, I also came to play with it. At the moment I was more into this game than anyone in the Village.

"Living! Isn't it so amazing?"

Perhaps it was because there was no need to use the head to survive, but I was fairyfying quite a bit.

Ahhh, right, right. There was just one thing that concerned me.

That was the difference in ratio of head to body.

Unlike me, who was had that ratio at just shy of three, the fairies had a ratio of about six to seven despite having the same height. All of them were androgynous and enchanting, without exception handsome, which I saw as quite angelic. Must mean that even my cognizance of the mischievous fairies had upgraded by that much, indeed.

This happened on a day in which I was completely addicted to that slovenly life.

"People, today we could not obtain sweets."

A fairy that had returned from the world below empty-handed uttered these shocking news.

"That's sad!" "We gotta endure, then?" "Time for austerity!" "Isn't that nice, once in a while?"

"Things like these happen at times!"

The guys seemed quite calm.

But I could not go one whole day without eating. I decided to voice my opinion.

"But I'm super hungry?"

"Ohhh, so when the lady is on an empty stomach she becomes like this, I see!"

"This matter is serious!" "We gotta do something about it!" "Does no one know anything appropriate?" "Mh-hm, kind of a difficult problem with got here, do we?"

A large group of fairies surrounded me in an instant and began discussing.

There I was, winning just because of the person I was, and I quite accepted their cuddles.

"As a conclusion, what we don't have we don't have, and that's how it is."

"Awww, there's no sweets then..." I could win because of who I was, but when it was time for a harsh conclusion to come, come it did. "...can't we make some?"

"Make some, you mean sweets?" "I see, what we don't have we should just make, isn't that logical?" "Speaking gentlemanly, that would be natural!" "But that's impossible!"

"What?!"

The harsh conclusion was in an unmovable spot.

"But whyyy?"

"Because we're really bad at making sweets, that's why."

Ahhh, that they were, if I recall correctly...

"Bad at it?"

"At the end of things, we're too carefree."

"Carefree..."

Measurement was an inviolable rule of making sweets. What will be made had infinite varieties obtainable just by changing the distribution even by a bit. On top of that, there was the baking and the whipping and many other delicate operations all jostled together.

"Which all means, it's impossible."

"...hummm..." I thought for a little while "If I have ingredients, you know, I can make some?"

"You can, young lady?"

"Aye, I can."

The fairies' well-proportioned faces turned towards each other and they began whispering.

"As far as ingredients, we can procure some."

"Then do, please."

Thirty seconds later, I had nearly all the ingredients at hand.

"So fast!"

"We're sorry to say that cake flour was the only thing we couldn't obtain."

"Ahhh. Then, on that, I can just use this, all right?"

The time to use the power of the spoon had at long last come again.

"Look closely close, right?"

I thrust the measuring spoon up high towards the sky with both hands.

"That's a spoon!" "It is!" "What're you going to scoop up?" "You're gonna scoop something up, right!" "I hope you can scoop up lots of things!" "In a variety of senses, scooping is fine!"

Now that I had gathered the attention of the fairies, I thrust the spoon into my own head. I yanked it out with a pop, and found the measuring spoon full of cake flour.

"Ohhh! That's magnificent!"

Bathed in a standing ovation, I was feeling very good.

"Oh dear, the number on the spoon has lowered from 32 down to 16, I see."

"...mh-mh..."

It really became 16. I had been concerned about that number from the start, but now...

"Ah...?"

A strong vertigo came to me, and I collapsed on the spot. I closed my eyes hard, and with a little endurance the discomfort vanished. But when I opened my eyes once again, I was struck by the sense that something was off.

The fairies had gotten waaay taller of stature.

Eight heads to their body... no, around nine heads?

Although their bodies were still the same ten centimeters, at that point the fairies had become around twice my height.

"...what the?"

It felt like my voice had gotten a bit of a lisp.

"This end result \*s astonishing." "Incredible th\*t something like lik\* would happen." "It's like \*n event from the world of make-believe had become a\* illusion right before us, isn't it?" "This may be said to be \* world-shaking event." "Mh-hm, what \*n incredibly uncommon phenomenon." "Do any of yo\* kind folks know anything about this phenomenon?" "No, never heard o\* anything like this." "However, there could be a difference between this and the things we a\*e involved with.!" "Mh-hm, that might be true."

Uhm, excuse me?

Their voices had become somber, and even their tones had become elegant...?

Incidentally, I had this feeling like the words my ears were hearing did not mesh with my consciousness and passed right through... it was like that, indeed. This feeling resembled how, when I was a child, I could not understand conversations between adults in the slightest. As I felt fear, one of the fairies stooped over and met with my gaze.

Ah... I felt more relaxed, more relieved. A soft and fluffy feeling.

"Young lady, you're not feeling poorly, perhaps?"

"Well, I am fine...?"

"It appears that, through some peculiar phenomenon, milady's stature has become smaller b\* about half your height. To make \* conjecture, because of \*f extreme and unprecedented reaction with this spoon, which \* speculate it might somehow make use of theories associated with \*ur fairy species."

"....." I nearly did not understand what he was saying. "...could you say it in like one word?"

"Yes, I will make this easy," and the fairy cleared his throat with a cough. "The sky \*\* types of existing \*\*\*\*\* which are, \*\* below \*\* in their normal state they \* could be said \*\* consequently the nucleus of an accidental event and \*\* because of that, a superposition of complex and highly dense \*\*\*\*\* are \*\* having that functionality, and we \*\*\* done that, it seems, but \*\*\*\* thanks to \* density is complex \* in case it is transformed, \*\* is extremely high—"

"Wait uuuuuuuuuuuup!!!"

"What happened, my dear?"

"I don't get it at all!"

This was odd. I was strange, the fairies were strange, my head was getting all dizzy and I just wanted to sprint away immediately with all my strength and vanish off somewhere, it was all like thaAAT!

"Then I will explain extremely simply." The fairy took in his hand the spoon that, at that point, had become longer than I was tall. "This spoon turned y\*ur faculties of th\*ught into cake fl\*ur." "...ahhh."

My faculties of thought turned into cake flour?

What were faculties of thought?

"To put it bluntly, the functions of your brain."

"Brain?"

"The brain."

"Braaaain?"

I tilted my body waaay to the right and asked back.

"The! brain!"

The fairy too tilted his body waaay to the right and responded.

My reaction to this pretty impactful event was—

"So that's what it was! Ahahah!"

I was losing even the faculties required to accept that an impactful event was in fact impactful.

"Normally, \* thing like th\*s that just lowers the powers of thought i\* easy to construct, but i\* one fusses on the details, having also \* physical effect o\* the flesh and blood body is much more amusing, and much more interesting."

The number on the spoon that the fairy was holding had increased and was now 49.

Ahhh, so that was it, the numbers... they were...

"I see, I understa\*d now. In short, this spoon has been created wi\*h the goal of turning faculties of thinking into flour."

And at those words from another fairy,

"That's right. It's just, since you're turning the faculties of thought into flour, unless you react t\* the intellect and change the physique to be more compact, it won't be interesting. Whoever m\*de this w\*s thinking t\*at."

"Ohhh, I can only agree with what you're saying."

I could not agree.

"So entertainment was the most important factor."

That was not important.

"Well, that's true."

This is a mess, do you understand?

"Hahahah!" "Heh heh heh!" "Hoh hoh hoh!"

The fairies laughed.

They laughed gentlemanly, like they were saying this was the High Society.

"Ahahah, hooh hoh hoh."

I also laughed. Because it was fun. I was that simple a creature at that point. My head was all fluffy, and I could no longer identify even a single danger to my own self.

But I was still feeling an unease that was hard to describe somewhere, do mind.

"Ahahah..."

As I laughed, I shed tears in large drops.

As drops larger than even the raindrops that I had seen on that day fell from me, as I cried, I caught the cuff of a fairy.

"...help me..."

I will no longer say that I just want it all easy. I will not skip out on my job.

I will not work together with the hamsters and steal vegetables.

I will not stay up late at night.

I will also stop my games of pouring water into anthills.

I will no longer say that I do not want to become a cogwheel of society.

I will actually participate in shared farmwork. I will not feign illness and stay home.

I will not make excessive and vague demands like saying I did not want a job that had no dream to it.

I will not find letters from friends annoying and will actually reply to them.

"And so, just help me, please..."

"It looks like milady rejects having become sm\*ll more than she enjoys the f\*n thing that happened to her." "Looks like \*t." "We gotta save her fro\* this." We truly d\*."

One stepped forwards as representative and gently spoke to me.

"Milady, please do not cry. We have ways."

"Which ones? Which ones?"

"By having your intelligence lowered by the sp\*on, your physique is also resized to match that."

It was probably how my intelligence having lowered to below a little child's, but despite there being more and more words that I did not understand, I frantically lent him my ears.

"The way to deal with this is simple. We should simply increase y\*ur intelligence."

"Deal with? Increase?"

I did not quite understand what he meant with all that.

Having inferred that, the fairy restated with an "In other words",

"You gotta study."

"Ahhh...!"

I could understand that!

I put my hands together and worshiped the fairy's divine countenance.

"Time to study."

He was like God!

And with that as reason, I began studying.

The fairies made me a special room for studying. I was very grateful.

However, for some reason it was made to resemble a jail cell for solitary confinement.

No, it did not "resemble" it, it was precisely a solitary confinement cell. There was no trace of the Marchen. It was a very real prison. As far as what was in there, there was a chair and desk for studying, a toilet, a bunk bed, a tiny shelf with the daily necessities on it, a bookshelf, and the sole and only luxury item was a sexy poster of Rita Hayworth (an actress from ancient times) on the wall.

...that was everything.

The window was tiny and the entrance had iron bars, so it did not appear I could leave freely. Beyond the bars there was a somewhat filthy concrete corridor. One of the walls was fully covered by a bookshelf. On it were textbooks and manuals and the like, all things that would not be enjoyable to read at all. It looked like that, given the goal was to increase my intelligence, for the time being they had crammed it with whatever introductory text they could get their hands on.

"...my mood might be going squishy...?"

I was already feeling crushed.

However, things rarely go as we wish, is what the guardian seemed to be saying as it showed itself.

"NUMBER FOUR, PLEASE LEARN."

The guardian was a mecha. It was a robot like a drum can the likes that would appear in ancient space war movies.

As for Number Four, that was me at present.

"PLEASE LEARN QUICKLY."

It hurried me along with an unnatural intonation made by synthesis.

"I did..."



"PLEASE LEARN MORE."

"But I learned a lot, you see?"

Today I had read more than enough books. I had read for nearly three hours. My overused head felt like jelly soup, to the point I could no longer think properly.

"My head is all spinny."

"OK."

With a sliding noise, the robot's built-in hypodermic needle jutted out of its belly. It was already filled with a green medicinal fluid.

"...w-, what's, that?"

"THIS MEDICINE WILL CLEAR YOUR HEAD."

"Clear my head?"

"THE TIREDNESS WILL GO POW! AND VANISH."

That was a very bad medicine, is it not...?

"TAKE THIS DRUG, THEN PLEASE LEARN MORE AND MORE."

"I-, I will do it without drugs!"

"THEN I AM SORRY."

The needle was withdrawn and I felt relieved.



That robot was scary...

I faced the desk, and from the bookshelf I took solid-looking volumes with titles such as "Starting with COBOL Now ~Learn It and You Will Eat For Your Whole Life~", "God's Own Investment Skills ~ The Alchemy of Olympus That Will Earn You a Hundred Million Easily~", "I Wonder Why People Are Ninety Percent Looks?", "An Overly Attached Idiot's Dignity", and "The Complete Handbook for Writing This Light Novel", and began reading them.

"....."

The robot remained in surveillance mode. It did not need to rest.

I was making good progress with the reading. It was from an ancient age, and reading it without understanding the context meant that I could not arrive at any sort of understanding. My patience was quickly exhausted.

"Uhm, what about breaks?"

"I HAVE NO NEED FOR THEM."

"But I do, so...?"

The robot was thinking. Its single eye blinked as it moved in all four directions.

"...THEN I SHALL GIVE YOU SOMETHING FOR ENTERTAINMENT."

"I want freedom..."

Something was thrown into the isolation cell from the distribution hole.

Thump, and what fell down making that sound was... an iron ball with chain attached.

"ATTACHING THAT TO YOUR ANKLE WILL GIVE YOU YOUR FILL."

"Ahhh..."

Suddenly feeling hollow, I sought the scene that was outside the tiny window. Tall and slender fairies were playing kemari. Ahhh, how dignified...

I wanted to play, too.

I will be killed... unless I do something I will die in this prison cell.

"NUMBER FOUR, IT IS ABOUT TIME TO STUDY. IF NOT, SHALL WE MAKE THE TIREDNESS GO POW! AND DISAPPEAR?"

The thing was taking out and drawing in the syringe with repeated sliding sounds, perhaps in an attempt to pressure me.

"Ngggh..."

I felt crushed.

It happened then. The poster attached to the wall was smoothly lifted up.

Under the sexy picture of Rita Hayworth there was concealed a square cavity, which had a red button inside. Next to the button there was a caution sign.

## *FOR GIVING UP*

"Doing it!"

I pressed it without hesitation.

The walls separated, sliding to the sides, and before me laid freedom.

I grabbed my sole personal item, the spoon that had been set to standing. Being five centimeters tall meant holding it was quite the arduous task, but I was still able to just barely carry it. The number was 16. No difference could be seen in the number that displayed intelligence. Living in solitary confined seemingly had no pluses, but no minuses either.

"I'll do more tomorrow."

Deciding that, I began running forwards.

As I did, the numbers went clack-clack-clack and dropped by four, becoming 12.

"Owchies."

It had lowered. Well, whatever, it was fine. As long as I did my best starting the next day, right?

"ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?"

The robot asked that from the other side of the bars, which had now moved such as to make that area into the jail. I told it this with plenty confidence.

"I am going to do it, you know?"

"WHAT?"

I made tight fists like a healthy young woman.

"...something."

"I SEE."

It felt like this robot was pitying me.

But right then I just wanted to play. I was fully in that mood.

I ran as far as my strength would hold up to the fairies playing kemari.

My *bwains* were now at 11.

The spoon showed that clearly.

11 was for the sort of person whose head merited sympathy. It was a big problem.

If I took an exam I would not come out unscathed.

But it was not only bad things. I lived without having to think about the details, and I could avoid understanding all the *hawd* stuff. I heard all that as good things.

The truth was different, maybe, but that was how I heard them.

Recently I began keeping a ladybug as a pet. Being five centimeters tall, it was as large as a puppy. I held him on a leash and took it for walks. I gave him a name, but I sort of forgot it. I wrote it on a note, however I forgot what the note was and could not understand it.

Also, these days I have learned how to turn spherical like a pillbug. That was like the fairies could do, so it was really nice.

Also croutons are delicious. I liked nibbling on them.

Every day I play. Together with the fairies. All the fairies are so tall. Only I am chibi. But I am loved. I could end my natural lifespan in this much love, that was what I kind of came to think at times.

"Young lady, would you like to \*o play in the ho\*se of God?"

"God?"

"That's right. The House of God."

"You never said it before?"

"It's \* very f\*n, you know."

"How's it like?"

The tall fairy thought then said this.

"You can g\*t sweets, you can get a na\*e, and that was also how I got my appellation of 'sir', it was originally bestowed to me by God."

"Hoh huh," I did not really get it. But it seemed fun. "Let's go."

"Of course, it's about time we went."

While I was smiling broadly, I felt that somewhere in my consciousness was going 'huh?'

Feels like I knew about this, feels like I did not.

The situation sort of did not feel very nice, but I quickly managed to forget about it.

The next day, we all went to visit the house of God. That was a really fun experience. This

place I had never seen before for some reason felt like I had seen it before. There were things I could not recall even when I tried recalling them, so my feelings went 'yeeeeah'.

It was an unusual fun. Despite that, the silly fairy said this.

"Sad to say this, but it appears that God is not in today."

"Whaaa?"

"She's always \* this place \*, a ni\* and wonderful God \*."

I sooo did not really understand the words of the fairy. But what I did hear is that it was a very wonderful God. Just hearing that made my heart go all throbbity and my body all shivery. If it goes throbbity then I say it was a game. If it was a game then I began feeling happy.

There had been so many fairies until a moment before, but now I could no longer see any.

The fairies were so mysterious.

They suddenly vanished, they suddenly got replaced... all that was normal. They moved around until my eyes went dizzy, doing all sorts of things. The fairies being tall was proof that they were adults. Adults have lots and lots of jobs to do, then, I idly thought.

Today ten of us had come, but I think they were now all doing their own thing.

I actually wanted to join them, but since I could not follow them around, I did as I always did and let all my mind casually wander about.

"Ohhh, this looks so *relish*, it does!"

I discovered a super big cookie.

"With this good omen, there's no worrying about the future."

The cookie was about the size of my height. I struck it "*t'oh!*" with the spoon and it broke off, so I took it to the house nearby. There was a lot of furniture there.

As I looked at some sort of painting, I pushed the piece of cookie into my mouth, and...

"...it's soggy!"

A soggy cookie was sad and depressing. A cookie without blessings needed the hands of love. Next, I discovered a mountain of sand.

"Searching around here was quite worth it."

When I thrust my hand in the mountain of sand, I suddenly felt like crying.

"...what?"

There was a big insect in the mountain of sand, but even if that had bitten the hand I thrust in, I would not be crying like this. What was it with this... feels like, it was a very important thing?

As I was spacing out, one of the fairies came by.

"Well now, it's cake flour, isn't it."

"Cake flour..."

I knew.

I knew that.

"It's one of the ingredients for making cookies."

Ahhh, that was true.

I was able to make cookies.

"So, want to make some?"

"Non-soggy cookies are a supreme treasure for us. I would most certainly like to do so, but to us it's impossible."

"...I can make them, you know?"

Though I believed I could make them, I had no confidence.

Hazy and ambiguous memories were the only things that declared that I could.

"As long as you graciously tell me what I should be doing, I can at the very least help."

"Well then—"

I was going to bake cookies.  
It felt like I simply needed to do that.  
The number on the spoon on my back decreased from 11 to 10.

Using the measuring spoon, I scooped up the cake flour.  
Seeing the number my head went dizzy. But I held it back.  
"Milady, I've prepared what you said, see?"  
"Than~." (Translation: thank you very much.)  
The ingredients were quickly prepared. Using these I could make sweets.  
"Lessee..."

How did you do this?  
My head wouldn't work, so I could only make them through the habits formed in my body. This was something I remembered surprisingly well, so the work was proceeding in a more and more orderly fashion.

I jumped down into the bowl's bottom and made the ingredients mixity mix and kneady knead. The mixed dough had become melty, so I shouted to the fairy above from the bottom of the bowl.

"Could you pour down the beaten egg?"  
"Do I put it in little by little?"  
Spinny spin kneady knead. The persistent work of mixing continued.  
"...done!"

The sweet scent of the vanilla oil added as essence wafted in from all through the dough.  
"Ohhh, this is really a marvelous smell. I just want to eat it like this, you know?"

"Noppity nope!"  
It was just the scent. The flavor was still bad. The process was only halfway done.  
I took out the finished dough from the bowl (using a man-powered crane), and we all stretched out the dough until it was flat. It was a dough carpet.

"It's done..."  
Now then, the next part was...  
"Oh dear dear."

I could no longer explain it with words.  
I took the item in my own hands by my own self and held it out, "*here it is!*"  
"Oooh!" and there was a commotion among the fairies.

What I had in hand was... a frame of with a star shape. One that had this (□) shape.  
Yes indeed, it was time for cookie cutting.

This was the most enjoyable part of making cookies. We all took turns and cut them out one at a time. The cut star shape we carried by making groups of two, lining them up perfectly on the baking tray.

After mostly cutting them out, the carpet of batter had become all holey.  
But if we balled it up again, and stretched it again, we could cut more star shapes.  
"Feels so nostalgic, this feeling..."

Even if the head did not remember, the body did. What a relief.  
The spoon's number was at present 7.

My heart skipped a beat. But as for why it was scary, that I no longer understood.  
Right now, I could only concentrate on the work before my eyes—  
The near totality of the dough had been turned into star shapes, and we finished setting it out on a second baking tray.

"Next, it's that!"

It was *that*.

The tallest of obstacles. The baking.

We set the oven's temperature to 170 degrees.

This was work that I could not do at the moment, so I asked the fairies and had them make ready.

It took really lots of effort to carry the baking trays to the kitchen.

The large group of fairies marched through the corridor like they were carrying a shrine on their shoulders.

"Go! Go!"

Riding on the bow of one of the baking trays I, huh!, felt like one of those women stuck to the tip of ships.

"This way! All of you!"

The fairies in charge of the kitchen received us by waving their arms.

The second baking tray proudly advanced in between the crowding populace.

"Golden brown!" (Translation: insert the baking trays in the middle level of the oven. Baking time is ten to fifteen minutes. As small things such as cookies burn quite quickly, you must carefully watch how things are going. Once they are all a golden brown they are done! Use a wire mesh or something to move them so you do not get scalds, and let them cool down a little! It would be nice to prepare some cold drink together with them, I would say. Once they are done, well, Sweets Time will begin!)

The baking had begun.

It was delicate work.

A little bit of inattention and they were all going to get burned.

And the only one who could measure time was me.

It was going to be bad if I did not keep it steady.

But... my awareness was now a fair bit pitiable.

It was all dizzy.

Putting the baking trays in the oven took a fair bit of time.

The number... what number was the spoon showing?

I fearfully looked, and found that it was the exact instant in which it changed from 5 to 4.

"Ah—"

Light withdrew all at once from the world.

The change was sudden, I suppose it should be said.

Knowledge and consciousness entangled, and for just this one instant I was made to keenly remember who I was.

However, that was no omen of recovery, it was something that resembled a blaze before one breathed their last, the very last wink of their eyes.

The light brightly filling my surroundings was drawn towards its point of origin... all of a sudden, it was dragged upwards.

I had no more than a faint view of my surroundings, as all that remained was something of a searchlight illuminating the deep sea.

An indistinct, lonely world.

It reminded me of someone bathing in a spotlight alone on top of a dark stage.

This was the world that I at present could be cognizant of.

The world of Intelligence 4.



I looked up at the ceiling, but it was all a stretch of darkness. What made a bustle in my heart was how nothing whatsoever existed.

Now just what has happened to all those fairies that were there?

I looked around, but I was surrounded by a bizarre pattern of vertical stripes.

—now just what could this be?

I had never seen anything like it.

Thin dull gray vertical stripes and thin black vertical stripes were alternating, all standing in a row.

They continued to where I could not see, up in the heavens.

If someone were to draw vertical patterns in for example a tube, and then slide it over the head of a person, they would replicate a similar scene, I believe.

Just what could this inexplicable phenomenon be... after careful consideration, I dismissed it.

"...I guess it's fine."

My heart felt heavy.

Doing thinky things just felt annoying.

Intelligence 4 means I did not even understand scary things.

I just wanted to rest easy.

That was all.

I put my behind down on the floor and hugged my knees.

4 became 3, eventually it will become 1 and when it became 0, I will stop being myself.

Ahhh, right, I remember it now.

The name of my pet ladybug was Algernon.

If I become stupid, someone please feed Algernon.

I ask truly as a favor.

And so I, like a stone cast in a pond, dove down and sank.

My mind was slipping away.

Lots of scenes were all vividly passing past the inside of my eyelids.

It was that life passing before your eyes thing. It was like a revolving lantern.

The memories of when I was a child.

The days at The School.

The events at the graduation.

Living with Grandfather.

Meeting the fairies.

Memories of my friends pointing at me and guffawing.

"....."

This was... on the day when she found me out, was it not.

Why now, when I had erased them from my memories!

Being embarrassed like that... it happened plenty of times, perhaps, but... for now, just for the sake of the story, I will say that it was the first time...

That was the first time I was embarrassed like that!

My friend Y, why, it could be said that there were problems with her personality.

It was frustrating. To become an idiot and disappear.

I did not wish it known, especially by her.

What an unbecoming way to die...

"...I do not wish it... whatever else I can think."

If I had to die, I wanted to die in my sleep after exhausting my natural lifespan. Without pain.

Fundamentally speaking, was it death when intelligence reached 0?

Only consciousness vanished, the body lived... or something, and if that was true...  
I came to have a steadily stronger negative image of this.  
"I would like to avoid that, at least..."  
To escape from this situation I must...  
Information...  
Right, information.  
Someone give me information, please.  
Encouraging information, special information, top secret information!  
Through a thirst for survival, I forcibly drew in the thing that had the most information density and was close at hand.  
In other words... the sole and only high-density technicolored image information record in a world scarce in darkness – rewinding the images that passed before my eyes.  
"Repeat playback shortened playback double speed triple speed quadruple speed!!!"  
Master Brain Matter began vigorously chewing on the information.  
At the fastest studying efficiency of my existence.  
The spoon's number flickered back and forth between 0 and 1.  
"Ngggggh!"  
Gradually the ratio of presence of the 1 increased, and with a clacking sound it completely switched over.  
"More, more... ten-per speeEED!"  
The images passing before my eyes were reproduced at a tremendous speed.  
And it was also a reproduction of points in time. I could hear the voices. No, I had to hear them. This was a struggle to the death.  
The result was outstanding.  
The number became 2 then became 3. It passed four, and in quick succession recovered to 6.  
A change occurred in the striped space around me.  
The vertical pattern quickly increased in width.  
The stripes were becoming thicker as the number rose.  
There was also a change in the brightness.  
The illumination no more than a spotlight became stronger, and in a reverse from before the darkness came to be distant, it became wide and tall and bright.  
The number had at present reached 10.  
The stripe pattern became thick and gained in color... and its nature was also revealed.  
"...legs?"  
It was a countless number of legs that seemed to stretch out into an infinite height.  
"Then above there are..."  
Above.  
That indicated an informationally higher domain.  
Above. That was where the information was. It was more than just an untranslatable pun.  
There could be no reciprocal recognizance between entities with a disparity of intelligence.  
They could not even notice that they were there.  
Legs like bamboo sticks, which appeared to be the fairies', extended waaay up in the distance.  
I could not see all the way up to the point between the legs, nor their waists. My eyes just barely managed to distinguish their shoes stretching vertically.  
If I said they looked like speed limit numbers as drawn on ancient roads, would you

understand?

They were drawn vertically, such that they would respect the perspective seen from when one was inside a car. It was exactly like that.

The number had presently returned to 14.

With perhaps the rapid rise of the rate of cognizance to blame, all of what I was seeing was flickering rapidly.

"I have to do it... there is a tremendous burden being laid on my brain..."

This was my chance.

I will bloom once again into the girl genius that I was!

"Twenty-per SPEEEEEEEED!"

Zwoooo, and the revolving lantern of the images passing before my eyes made a full revolution.

Replayed that fast, I came to see in great detail even memories I did not want to remember.

"Awww, nooooo?!"

Awww, these were painful... these were all painful memories...!

I wanted to live sequestered in my house in perpetuityyy!

The number broke 15.

"Ah, is that...?"

Something approached from the heavens, and that was when it happened.

In the beginning it was nothing more than a single point, but it gradually enlarged and came to be right next to me.

It was star shaped... it was golden brown...

It was a cookie!

A cookie was descending from the sky.

"Aaah!"

This mega cookie that was quickly filling my field of vision entirely I embraced feeling like I was receiving God.

The majority of the bony fingers that grasped the cookie vanished quickly far upwards.

It was a fairy, was it?

Ahhh, the scent of baked cookies!

That was a tremendous amount of information.

Just by living, people are touched every day by an absurd quantity of information.

I opened my mouth wide and bit into the cookie.

Every little stimulus turned into information, and I bit into them as my teeth felt the cookie's crunchiness.

"Thish ish happinesh!"

One mega-cookie eaten fully and non-stop.

Immediately afterwards, the number leaped up to 45 with a force that sounded like a joke.

"Eeek!"

Visual information updated. Limits of consciousness updated.

The instant I grew to Intelligence 45, I recovered the intelligence to acknowledge the world.

The next thing I noticed was that I was standing in a vividly colored world.

"...ah, I a-, am returning..."

I touched my face here and there and stroked my limbs one at a time.

"Heh, hah, hoh!"

That sense of isolation that was pecking at my heart and worming its way through me had

gone away.

"Are you all right?"

There were also the faces of the fairies at the same eye level.

"Oooh, I became ten centimeters in size..."

A single cookie rewound me back all at once, what was up with that?

"Milady, they're just about perfectly baked, aren't they?"

I was surrounded by a mountain of oven-hot cookies that the fairies had baked.

I carried chunks of them to my mouth as we exchanged a pleasant conversation.

"Ah..."

That cookie... its ingredients...

I only noticed now at last, you see.

They were the contents of my head—

"STOOOOOP!"

I waved my hands hard and climbed up the cookie mountain at a run, and from a height I declared this.

"These cookies actually have poison in it!!!"

"Whaaat?!"

The voices of the fairies resounded far.

"And that is why you cannot eat them! I will be collecting them!"

I recovered the cookies from every fairy.

"They are dangerous, therefore I shall sterilize and dispose of them!"

"Whaaat?!"

Do you think it was shameful of me?

But there was nothing else to be done.

Because these cookies were my intellect itself.

If everybody ate them, I would not be able to recover that part of my intellect, you see?

That was what the spoon had transformed.

It was not really cake flour.

It was intelligence transmuted and transformed into ingredients for making sweets.

To call it, the cookies were brain-flavored.

What an unfunny punchline, indeed.

I believe I should apologize for it.

But that too was a secret!

I would be happy if you could be understanding in that regard.

The cookies I ate alone.

A mountain of cookies several times my own body weight, all alone, indeed, all alone.

Because of that, my intelligence parameter had recovered up to 250. Do you remember what was the initial figure?

It was 322.

I ate all the cookies and now it was at 250. The difference was all of 72.

Even if we removed the amount that I had self-increased by re-education via life flashing before the eyes, around 50 had vanished off somewhere. There was certainly some part that had vanished into the stomachs of the fairies. But there was also another reason, see.

Those Intelligence Cookies... it was still a good thing that I recovered the majority of them.

And a part had escaped, I must say.

It was all because their discovery was belated.

Happily, once I went past around 100 my head to body ratio had well more or less improved into something that could pass for a human. As I had to apologize for the lengthy absence, I showed up at the office. As for my height, I was around the ninety centimeters tall, I guess. The size of a pretty nice antique doll.

Grandfather liked those, did he not. Well, that was what I was going for.

"I apologize for not contacting you for so long, Grandfather. It is me."

Grandfather gave me deeply scornful eyes.

"...why you... no, forget it. Don't say anything."

And then he went and squeezed the inner corners of his eyes.

To be the proud granddaughter of this eccentric Grandfather... was a position that seemed to require much more self-discipline in order to be gained.

As far as looks went, I did believe I was on the right track, however, understood?

After all I was small, my looks ephemeral to begin with.

"...you listen to me here. Humans are their aura."

"Their aura?"

"Everything is decided by the aura. Even if you look ephemeral, the aura that comes from inside you must be that of a young lady sequestered in some inner room, or you'll be seen through."

"....."

"You are completely missing that mystique. Your exteriors may be those of a doll, but the inside is vulgar and worldly."

"Worldly..."

"Give it up. And regain your original figure already. You're too tiny, it's distracting."

I had received a phrase that did not quite seem thinkable of a flesh and blood relative, but it seemed that I was going to avoid the punishment for disappearing. Well, besides, there are reasons for that.

"It's not been a full day, right, but still you up and disappeared. Last night you were doing something in the kitchen all night, I know that much."

Well well well now?

Not a single full day had passed?

"I thought it had been about over ten days..."

"That's odd. But you know, do you? Both tiny animals that live just a few years and the huge elephants that live for several decades, the rhythm that marks the time of their lives is around the same."

"...huh?"

"The number is said to be one point five billion. The average value, that is. It's just that, depending on the animal, the experience of that rhythm is slow or fast, that's all there is."

That explanation was quite hard to understand, but at present it felt realistic to me.

"The time for very tiny animals passes vertiginously fast compared to that of humans... is that what you mean?"

Grandfather made a satisfied smile. It had, however, just a little bit of the grin.

"Exactly."

These days that felt like ten were actually an event that had lasted one day.

Not quite something I could readily believe.

While I had experienced it, excluding that final experience, that was all unbelievable, you see.

The days for a small life were much finer and faster than a human's.

The cognizance of a tiny heart spoke out of a completely different world than men's.

Exactly how I was altered into the figure of a fairy to *suit* my intelligence.

"You should get to your original size as fast as you can. You know how it is. That size there, it might become an impediment for marriage."

"Wha...!"

Recognizing his meaning, I was at a loss for words with a beet red face.

Now that I had become Intelligence 250, my physique had largely returned to human standard.

...it was hard work, understand?

How much of that went into the height, I wondered. At present I was around one hundred fifty centimeters, more or less. The proportions of each part was small, so I came to look like a doll. Should I have been happy about that, I really wondered.

There were a variety of further developments to this adventure I had.

First, development number one... it concerned the matter of the underfloor.

One day after I had returned to human size I began being annoyed by something I could hear from below the floor. And so I ripped out a floorboard and began investigating! And I found that wild hamsters were dwelling there. They numbered five.

They all shouldered nails and wore overclothes, of course.

...indeed, in short, that was exactly how it seemed, I believed. When I discovered them our eyes met, and they got startled and pitifully froze on the spot. The guest who lived with them at that time was me, but... they could not identify that.

It did feel sad, but it was understandable. Hamster have a hamster's world to be cognizant about, and at present I was wholly excluded from that.

Also, they had had that truly terrible experience back then, as well.

All of them had lost a circular part of hair from stress. Their coats of fur were also all ruffled.

They had barely escaped a threat to their lives, what else. They ultimately had no alternative to the dangerous choice of living hidden under a floor in a village of men.

How sad.

I did decide to present the underfloor guys with the miniature furniture I had built as well as food. Their standard of living should be on the rise from their living in tiny thatched roof houses.

Even sunflower seeds were easy to procure, now that I had become human again.

I quietly peeked in at times, but it looked like they had settled down quite well. They looked like they were using the furniture, and the food I gave them did actually decrease. And then, and then—

"Grandfather, could we procure a female hamster somewhere?"

"What're you gonna do with that?"

"I just need one."

"You gonna eat it?"

"...I just need one."

"I heard they were rare animals, but... is some crossbreed fine?"

"Indeed, I suspect that anything will do as long as she is a female."

Not long afterwards, the caravan carried in from a nearby city two female hamsters.

I released them under the floor. The hamsters were also quite surprised, of course. Females just fell from the sky one day, after all.

"The rest I leave to you and your own personal transactions."

Telling them that, I placed the floorboard back.

If this were to breathe back life into them as a race, it would allow them to also attain a far more intellectual culture, but, well, that was something for far in the future, however. It should be quick, given they advanced so that they could build lightbulbs of their own power. Should, at that time, there be no one left anymore, then may I entrust the Earth to you?

Second further development.

"There was a fire in the forest."

Grandfather said that.

"Huh."

"So the nests of wild animals have been burned out and the animals cast outside. There shouldn't be any particularly dangerous creature there, still, do be careful when going into the woods."

I heard about that in the office when my intelligence number had reached around 260.

Also, I heard from that mild-mannered Eggs Lady the rumor that it had become popular among the people of the Village to feed starving wild animals.

And then, the next day...

"Well now?"

As I was returning from picking up rationed foodstuff, there was a white long-torsoed animal at my feet. He smoothly coiled about my legs.

"...are you...?"

I was holding a paper bag, so he probably concluded that I had food.

The animal that persistently rubbed its body on me, frantically demanding something, was... not a white weasel.

"Ah, is this... an ermine?"

An ermine was a carnivorous mammal of the weasel species.

Even he, whom I saw as so terrifying, was thus nothing more than a tiny animal when seen with human eyes.

Worse, he was used to getting food from humans, and had even learned to be cuddly for it. And that was despite how, when I met him at ten centimeters of size, he felt like he should have been called Lord Ermine.

In the grazing land beyond a stone wall I could see the brown furs of his companions, the other ermines, moving about here and there.

"You were about to kill me..."

The white ermine sprawled down in the direction I was going, tumbling and showing his belly. Getting food or getting none: he was showing intimate knowledge of how frantic he had to be in order to do something about the boundary between those two things.

"Now, seriously!"

Startled, it shuddered and leaped back by about a meter. And that despite how I expected his disposition to be ferocious.

"Really, that is enough..."

I exhaled a sigh and took out from the bag some food that looked like they could eat.

The white ermine was very excited.

He had no pride of any sort, it just ran round and round near me.

"Receiving food just by snuggling up to people is the delusional cliché of the weak, right?"

".....k-, kyu?"

The way the white ermine buttered me up was awkward, such that I could not say he was used to it.

Except that the way he was intimidated and embarrassed more or less satisfied me.

"Here, have this."

The white ermine took the food in his mouth, and even the ordinary brown ermines little by little approached. Their hierarchy too looked like it was as it used to be.

I counted them, and found they had decreased by about three. All ermines had some scorched fur. We have to press our hands together in prayer for about three of them, that was how it was. It was possible for even the pouring rain to fail to extinguish a forest fire. Thinking that, I felt that these animals were quite pitiable, as well.

"I am going to rub your belly."

I forcibly flipped over the white ermine, and ignoring how he cried *kee kee* I rubbed him down all I wished.

"I have had my fill."

"Kyuuu~..."

And that was how I could forgive you, you see.

Third further development.

This was the last such further development.

Occasionally, an acquaintance of Grandfather's came to the office to have tea and chat.

Of course I also had to be present at that, but from the viewpoint of that person I knew nothing about I was just some unknown young lady. But once he learned that I was the newest hire and granddaughter, I of course came to receive a barrage of nosy questions.

It was sort of tough, but I did my very best to cope with it.

If I did not act commendably for at least a short while, punishment may well fall on me from the heavens...

Because of things like that, slight though they may be, my interactions with the people of the Village were progressing, and my fear towards solitude, which for a brief while had become truly serious, also saw a gradual reduction in these days.

And so, let us come to the real matter.

"Still, I see weird creatures have increased in number again these days."

The casually stated words of the guest startled me into stiffening.

"Have you just said, weird creatures?"

I asked that as I was serving black tea, making sure the startle within was not noticed.

Normally I escaped back to my desk as soon as the greeting was done, but this time I settled down on the sofa, and the elderly man sitting next to me gave me dubious eyes.

"...yes, I've only seen them once, but they looked like starfishes."

They looked like starfishes.

My bad feeling about this was correct.

The *things* had caught human eyes at long last.

"And what do these starfish-like creatures do?"

I leaned forwards and encouraged him to continue.

"The guys in the Village call them starfish bugs, but... yeah, there go them creepy things once again, is what we're thinking."

"My, that is quite the trouble. If there is anything whatsoever I might do I will gladly help," and



then I went into the real subject. "So, these starfish bugs, approximately where did you witness them?"

"Oi, what're you..."

Grandfather was about to say something, but I restrained him with a glance.

To me it was a matter of life and death, this one here.

"Right, in the Village..." the elderly man started saying, but suddenly he pointed at the wall.

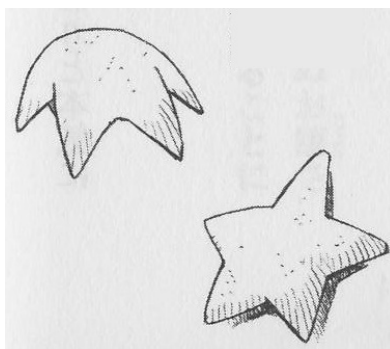
"Over there!"

"!!!"

With lightning speed motions I rushed up from the sofa and attacked the starfish-shaped creature attached to the wall.

Faster than the starfish bug could steady itself, I struck it with the palm of my hand and killed it.

This creature could use its five limbs and jump like a grasshopper.



"Hoh hooh. She may feel graceful and refined, but that's a really active granddaughter you got, sensei."

"This is embarrassing."

"Killing a bug with bare hands, the young lady is really something."

"This is really embarrassing."

Grandfather's tone of voice was eerily quiet. I was sure he was holding something tremendously strong inside his heart. That was the attitude of someone truly embarrassed of their granddaughter.

But he was not suspecting what I was really doing, correct...?

"I a-, am really good at exterminating these insects. If you witness any in the Village, please make sure to contact me, all right?"

I hid the killed starfish in the hand behind my back, and smoothed things up to try to keep up appearances.

"Enough of that already, get back to sitting. You're making a racket," went Grandfather.

"Yes sir."

'Starfish bugs'.

They were actually those cookies baked with the cake flour extracted from my head.

When just baked, they were normal cookies.

I had eaten all I could eat and preserved the ones remaining, thinking I would eat them a little at a time in the next days... but then the cookies first began squirming on the plate, then leaped out in scattered directions.

The starfish bugs were in short cookies given with intelligence.

On that day the curtain inconspicuously rose on a life of hunting of starfishes, one that I kept concealed in the shadows of my life.

They did indeed go feral, though I had somewhat accepted that they would the moment they began moving. I even spotted one of them attempting mitosis. Everything else aside, until I had recovered my lost intelligence, my days of starfish hunting will continue, that was certain. Well, I could still study and recover it with my own strength, but...

"...I have a weird granddaughter."

"Nah, you know what it is, it's the difference in generations. Why, my own granddaughter—"

With two elderly people conversing next to me, I did nothing but smile brightly. And then, finding a moment in which their eyes were averted, I chucked the killed starfish bug into my mouth.

Off from somewhere there was a tiny sound like '*clack*'.

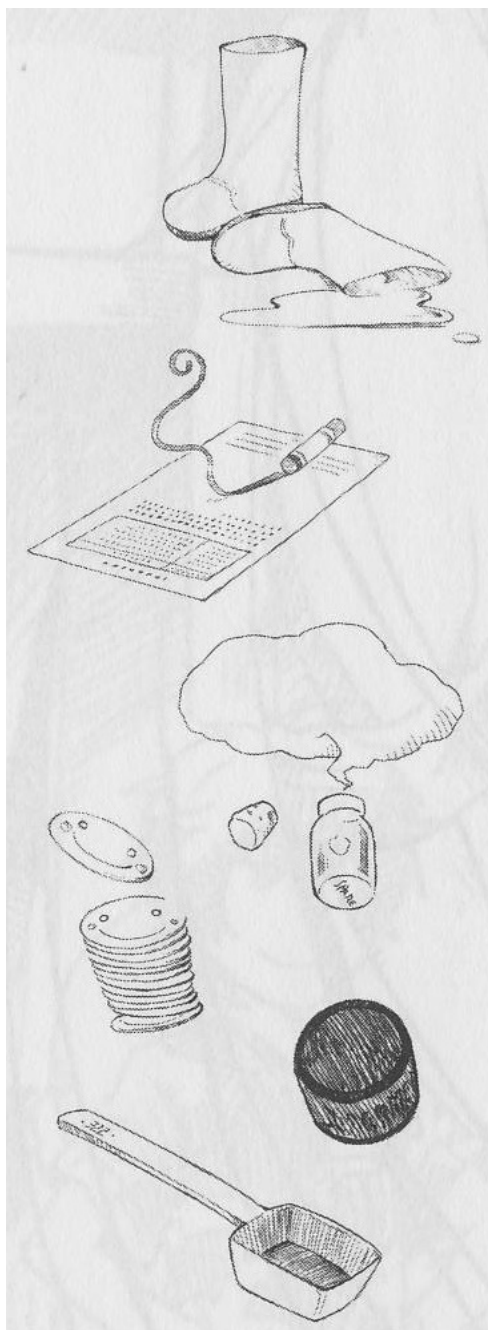
## Fairy Memo - Fairy Tools

The tools that the fairies make all have some bizarre effect built into them.

Which effect that is depends on the tool. Occasionally they are no laughing matter, so use lots and lots of care should you acquire one of them.

On the matter of form and size, the majority is built in human size, so they aren't made for their own use, they could be called presents for the humans.

For some reason, no matter how strictly they are supervised, the fairy tools tend to go missing. Quite mysterious!



妖精さんたちの、じかんかつようじゅつ  
The Fairies and Time Management Skills





Provided they are not dead or in a coma, no natural resource is provided as equally and as continuously to people as time.

And there appeared to be no field of application reliant on the individual that stood out as much as the skill in practical usage of time.

I was aware that, in that criteria, I was an unskilled person.

Grandfather was early in both daytime and nighttime, so looked in as an outsider, the rhythm of his life did feel stable, however with me that became random coping as, for example, it was remarkable how the conclusion as to whether I would get up before noon or not had to be reexamined every day.

Even in this age alarm clocks did exist, but they did not have much effect on me.

Going out to the office before noon was a basic pattern that I had set for myself, but of late the frequency with which I was able to achieve that had rapidly decreased, and time and again I came to be tormented by a sense of irritation.

But for the present day, I managed to do so.

When I showed face at the office it was just a little before eleven.

I was going to be able to enjoy the tea of the eleven o'clock break, in fact.

"Good morning, Grandfather."

I was also clear and brisk with my greeting.

"Yeah..."

What came back was a half-hearted answer.

Located with the window side at its back, Grandfather's seat was the most blessed with daylight in the office, and there he sat, reading a document, looking bored.

Whatever may be said, this office where I was subordinate and student held, in many forms and due to many avenues, a great number of documents and records.

Neither bibliophile nor bookworm, my grandfather was however quite the indiscriminate reader.

*"We found an important book, so we will be leaving it with you, Scholar-sensei."*

And with those few words appended the shaking of the caravan brought books that he read from one end to the other, then tossed into the empty neighboring offices, a behavior that he had repeated time and again.

Except for our office, every other room was empty here on the third floor of the Kusunoki General Cultural Center. Or rather, this building itself was no more than being reused, a situation that had arisen because there was nobody nowhere who knew the whereabouts of its official owners.

Ah, the reason why we did not use the empty offices next door was that they were buried in books piled up in ways that at this point resembled stupas.

A whole floor filled to the brim with books laid vertically was quite the spectacle.

On the desk there were all of three towers of books tied fast. What he was reading at the moment seemed to be a volume among those.

"Has the caravan come?"

"Yeah..."

So it appears that there are new books (though they were all old books).

The caravan made use of separate, multiple lines, and smaller ones did happen to arrive without warning.

"By the way." Grandfather lifted his head. "A big package has arrived. I put it in the reception room."

"Is it for me?"

"Seems so."

Having said just that, Grandfather returned to his reading.

"A package...?"

The reception room was only such in name, it was a small space separated by just a wooden plank, and when I peeked there I found quite the large wooden box.

What could it be, I thought as I used a prybar to tear it open.

"Ah, a bottle of candies...?"

A massive gold bottle had been crammed inside the straw used as packing.

Back when there was that brouhaha about the papercrafts, the fairies had hit on a prize-winning caramel candy, and as they did not understand how, I participated in their stead. One if gold, five if silver: the caramel candy the fairies had gained was a gold one.

"It arrived in less than two months... their response time is quite fast."

Even in this world of decreased people there was someone somewhere doing their job seriously.

"But still."

I tried taking it out and found that the can was an armful. It weighed quite a bit, so much that carrying it without using the handles was a little problematic.

"This is the first time in my life that I have seen this."

Although I did participate to the contest, having this actually mailed to me exceeded my expectations.

Under my authority as a student of candies I did feel like I wished to review the contents, but this belonged to the fairies. I had to first deliver it to them.

Thinking that, I announced my excursion to Grandfather.

"No, wait. I know I didn't tell you, but my assistant is actually returning here today."

"Yes...?"

I froze on the spot, still holding the golden bottle.

"I've been telling you, haven't I. You know he's been resting because of his circumstances, it's just that today he's going to return to the workplace."

I did hear about Grandfather's assistant. But—

"If I remember correctly, he was hospitalized for a checkup, right?"

"That's right. It's not just that, the guy got personal circumstances, and I wanted to entrust him to someone for a while, but... it's not an urgent problem, that's all."

I could not reply.

I was overcome for a moment, holding the golden bottle, turning into the statue of a woman. So perfectly that, unless I did something, I would turn into something excavated from ruins about the Mediterranean Sea in about two centuries.

I was in shock.

This situation in which an unknown person was entering into the territory I knew and loved was not one I was good with. That went all the more when it was someone of the opposite

sex, specifically.

I was an animal with strong awareness of the territory. A feline.

And as I stood there, Grandfather struck me once more.

"I leave picking him up to you."

"This is a distressful job indeed."

"What're you talking about."

Someone of the same age and opposite sex will be settling down nearby in permanence.

I did believe that feelings like these would be plausible in someone young, more or less, but... for Grandfather, an elderly person who at this point had spent several times the years of that youth, coming to an understanding might be tough.

In addition, as the Former Humanity we had forgotten strife, we were all of placid personalities.

There appeared to not be quite that many people who could understand these circumstances. Young people more or less made merry, but being an age of hyperdeclining birth rates, their number could be said to be so low as to belong to a rare species.

"That job appears to be much too much for me to handle."

"The hell're you saying."

"He is your assistant, right Grandfather? How about you going to pick him up?"

"Well, I got stuff to do."

Awww... this looked like it was going nowhere.

"...no matter what?"

"What're you so nervous about. It something to fear? You're both humans. Go with a *swish* open your hearts with a *gah hah hah* hold your shoulders like *tight* and bring him in all smoothly."

That sounded like how bearded vikings would open their hearts to each other.

Nothing to be done about this. I could only go.

I gave him a pained face like my chronic annoyance had come up and declared this.

"Understood... I shall be going... for this too is the job, right..."

Grandfather said this without paying any attention to my anguish.

"There's this house-shop called The Lamb and Olive that's facing out on the square, right? He should be waiting there."

This brought up a question.

"Ah, Grandfather, how come we have to go pick him up in the first place?"

"Mh?"

"The Assistant knows the location of the office, what about that? Why do I have to go out and go pick him up?"

"...so I didn't explain that."

Grandfather made a serious face.

"Truth is, he... has something different from the norm. Ordinarily he, how to put it, really indefinite, that's what."

"Indefinite?"

"That's hard to understand, I see."

"No... it is merely because that is not an expression that I hear often when someone is criticized."

Grandfather had a stern face as he began examining his words closely. The words that soon came from his mouth were much heavier than I expected.

"He comes from a people scarce in number that live on a plateau, and since their

environment had been severed from all contact for around a hundred years, when he was discovered there was no one who had survived except for him, you see. He'd been preserved as the last one. Furthermore, it was concluded that he was going to be unable to live independently in that land."

"Well now..."

"After that, he was handed around until at last he came to be entrusted to me, and that's how it went."

"Those are some circumstances to have."

"He's a youngster unused to the world, he needs assistance..."

Grandfather's voice was hoarse, such that compassion seemed to be mixed with it.

He was the extremely fragile type.

A young person who lost his weight and was also scarce in will to live, a sickly and unreliable one...

But as far as those types went, there were some back at The School, and so I came to think that we might be able to get along without too much stress.

"By the by, how is he, as far as looks?"

"Hmmm."

Grandfather nodded and veery smoothly began talking about *his* characteristics.

"As far as looks he's a normal young one. I think that he has the expectable build, being a hot-blooded young man. Right, if I am to compare with history I would say he is Heracles, if a god then Ares, he has the image of a really very ordinary youth."

"On what star can something that manly be claimed to be ordinary!"

My feelings, so shaken by sympathy, were scattered by an attack of muscular shock.

"But youngsters gotta be like that, or..."

"That is just the type of youngster that you prefer, is that correct Grandfather?"

I must have hit the mark, because he was pushed into a silence where he huffily moaned something with his mouth twisted.

"...well, that only goes if he has a passionate will. Even if he had ordinarily a tough and macho musculature, when it comes to the core he lacks bravery, and at this point there's little helping it if the impression he leaves is weak."

"So the average is macho in your world, Grandfather."

That was a nasty world.

"Being macho and leaving a weak impression are completely disconnected things, but... well, I believe I have understood what type you are talking about."

"Mh-hm. Thanks. At thirteen."

As there was still far too much time left, I decided to deliver the golden bottle to the fairies while it was still before noon.

If I dropped by the Village on the way back, it should be just the right time, I expected.

"Ah, right. I would like to ask if he has any distinctive marks, such as he wears glasses or he has some braid."

"...distinctive marks?"

His eyes went wide for some reason.

"It cannot possibly be that he has none, of course."

"Now what was it..."

"You are not telling me that you have never seen him face to face before?"

"No, that I have. I met him many times, but... well, you know. Like I told you before, he's a young man who leaves a weak impression. Physically he's average."



Grandfather's viewpoint on 'average' was quite twisted, however...

Like this I had to be suspicious as to whether he was really a big macho man. I was sent to meet someone defined only by a very broad outline.

"That is enough of that. I will be going."

I packed the bottle and some lunch and departed the office.

These were the events that happened a little past eleven o'clock.

Be it gaps between things or tiny sheltered places or something similar, there existed many hidden places.

They were where people did not ordinarily live.

Abandoned buses, ruined buildings, playground equipment, mountains of trash and more, there were things that did seem fun.

The fairies generally laid concealed in places such as these.

Normally they lived crossing from gap to gap, nothing more than harmless creatures.

However, once their number increased, they linked together like some species of social insect, and began manifesting technological skills that could be called extraordinary.

They built massive cities and palaces, generated scientific technologies that were undiscovered by the Former Humanity, and played until they tired of it... and then they scattered. To put it bluntly, they had a Gathering-Scattering Disposition.

The interesting point was how, when they did not have a large population, their cultural level settled down to a more moderate extent.

It had to be said that being capable of larger scale engineering when the population was large was the same for us Former Humanity, however.

Regardless, at present there was no fairy gathering that would make for a village, and so I could only search for them by wandering about.

As long as I found even one, it should not be too difficult.

And once I handed the golden bottle to one of them, they will noisily gather together like links in a chain.

It could even be possible that they already arrived at a high level of culture, and that each of them was having quite the fun.

The fairies' ability to redo civilization multiple times made them amazing.

The office was isolated, surrounded by grazing lands, and I walked out from it on the opposite site of the hill down which stood the Village, eventually coming to tread into a land that did have houses yet had no people living in it.

Walking in what used to be sprawling gardens I spotted a tiny path that seemed to be an animal trail.

It was a path no wider than one person.

The lawns beyond the wooden fence to my right and low grove to my left towered like walls.

In the grove there was a scene generated by things left be, a simultaneous blooming of flowers of all colors such as daffodils, azaleas, and rhododendrons.

Eventually I came to a Y shaped path.

According to the slanted, rotten sign, right was an orchard, left was houses.

I walked down the left, making my way through the thicket growing to invade the tiny path, and a half-collapsed white-walled house attracted my attention.

"Hmhm."

The house was missing everything from around the mid part of the wall up to the roof, like a

giant had taken a bite out of it.

The wall was dyed green by the ivy grass, but I could still see that before falling to the wilds it had a beauty that felt like that of the Wordsworth House.

"...looks like they're here."

I strained my eyes and looked around veeery well.

There were several suspect locations, but... the one that particularly drew my eyes was, "There."

In a corner of a wall broken and jagged.

"Good day."

Inferring their presence and addressing them, I saw a familiar tiny head hopping out and shaking.

"May I make my appearance?"

"Do come out."

A ten centimeters tall New Humanity, a fairy, made his appearance.

I set down the bottle and stated this.

"I brought you lots of sweets."

"Are you sane?"

"Please call everyone."

"Yes!"

Hopping about like a flea, the fairy disappeared into the thicket.

He came back around thirty seconds later.

"I brought them with!" "Weeee!" "There's a human!" "Looks strong!" "Are we gonna play?"

There were a total of five. There did not appear to be any I was acquainted with.

The first fairy stood at my feet and said this.

"Will you eat all of us?"

"I will not eat you, I mean it."

"...I see..."

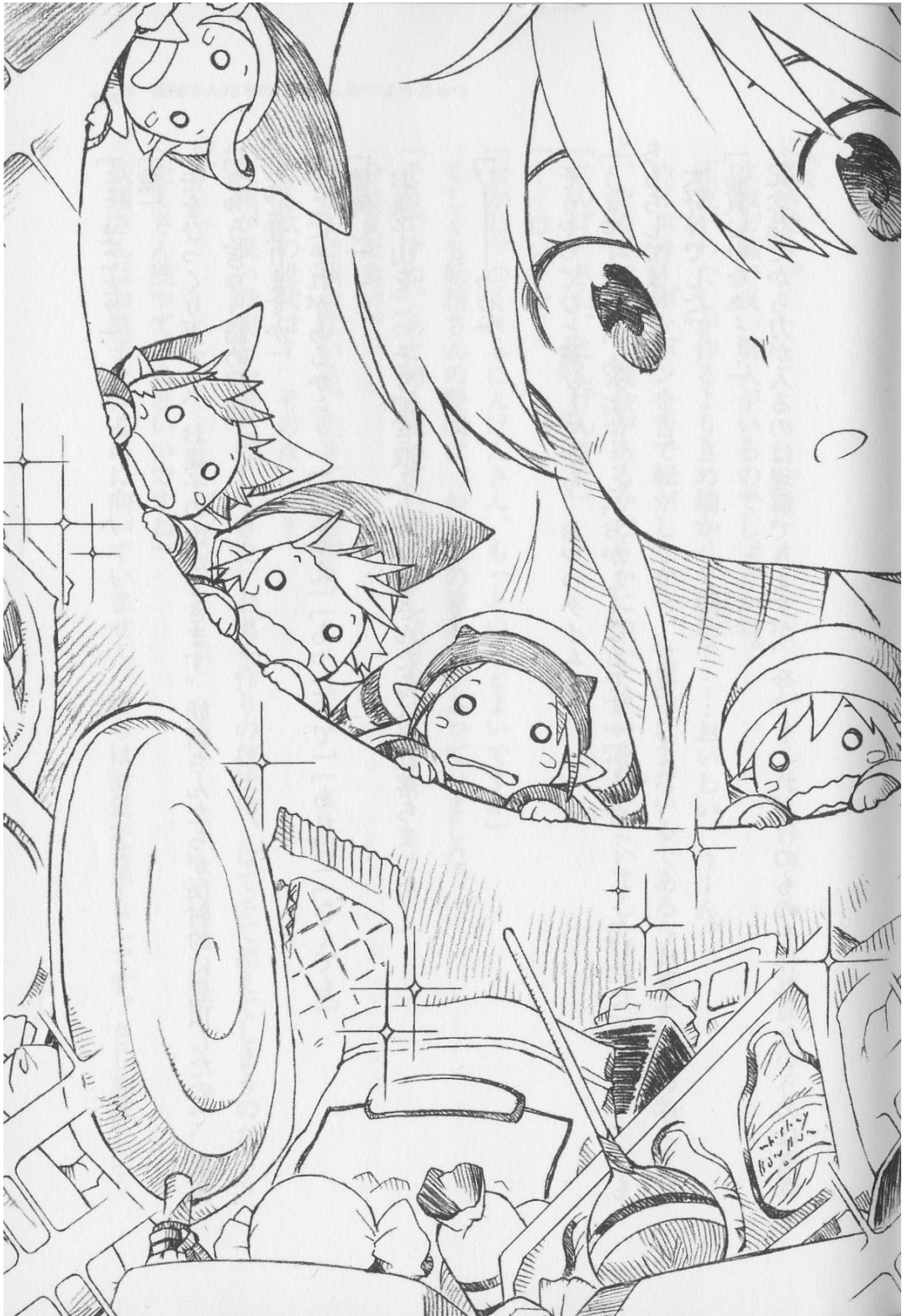
What was he so disappointed about?

I held the bottle between my knees and popped the seal. It made a neat '*pap*' sound.

"The mystery of the content of the sweets bottle that has lasted for many years is now being revealed..."

"Oooh!" "It's golden!" "What is it, what is it!" "...it's really stimulating."

The fairies each hung to the outside of the bottle and peeked inside together with me.



"Oooh..."

The bottle was golden on the inside too.

The light that was shining in was reflected, dancing and swaying on top of a small mountain of sweets.

It was a bewitching scene.

"I a-, am frozen..."

One-bite chocolate, whiskey bon bons, candy, wafers, cookies, rice cakes, crackers, fruit gummies, bean jam-filled wafer cakes, strawberry pie, lollipops...

It included even factory-made products, they were all things that at this point were hard to come by.

Wrapped in abundantly colored packaging, they were like the contents of a jack-in-the-box.

"....." "....." "....." "....." "....."

The fairies were all as one spacing out.

Dazed their jaws dropped, like their soul had left them.

"Hello?"

I poked one's cheeks with my fingertip, and *paf* he fell. Like a mature fruit.

When I had taken down all of them, they had regained consciousness at last.

"Come now, you can eat, you know?"

"...really?"

"Really."

I emptied the bottle, forming a mountain of sweets. The fairies reflexively summited the mountain, its top coming to be packed tight.

"Why are you climbing it?"

"Because it's there?" "It's there, and so!" "It was there!" "Since it's there!" "Even if it wasn't there...!"

"Like in bo-taoshi?"

Large chunks of the mountain got picked off, and the fairies tumbled down.

""""""P!!!!!!!!!!!!!!?!""""""

And after that game, it was snacks time.

"Del'cious!" "Tastes so nice..." "I feel like I'm going strange!" "The gummy... it resembles a jellyfish...!" "It's all so spongy...?"

The reviews were very positive.

"These are all quite well done, are they..."

I understood that it was a memento and that is why they put so much effort in it, but it left me sincerely surprised that all these things could still be manufactured in these days.

It seemed like they had some truly skilled employees, did they.

Honestly, they were more detailed and delicate than what I could make, and... delicious. Mh-hm.

As I made a whiskey bon-bon tumble on my tongue, my thoughts ran to the sweets-making masters that still existed in this world, and to whether I would ever have a chance of meeting them before dying.

"Master human, master human!"

"...yes?"

"It would be so much better if there were more humans who could make sweets!"

The fairy's strange question put an end to my thoughts.

"That is true. Now how many are still left, I wonder..."

Right now it was still fine.

People still remained. They lived.

But what about the next generation? And the one after that?

It was all about whether the art of sweets-making, which humanity had bequeathed across long times, was going to survive in the end.

"I hope there are many left."

Fairies were not made to make sweets. They were no good at measuring. They might not even know about dosing.

In practice, they had reached the peak of their ability to make things, indeed.

"I would really like for there to be many of them."

One of the fairies lifted his head.

"That's not, well, impossible you know?"

"What did you say?"

"If you make an effort!" "Then dreams will come true, you know?" "Even if you don't, they will come true!" "I would also say that it's possible that they won't!" "Wishes, they really will, will come true, actually?"

"B-, by what method?"

Five voices overlapped.

""""""Cloning.""""""

"No."

"Awww..." "Answered without hesitation..." "So that gets a no..."

They occasionally said things that startled you.

"Cloning technology... humans also did quite a bit with it, but it was banned."

"Why?"

"Ethically speaking..." I could explain that to them, but they would not understand. "...because the important people really got angry."

The fairies turned pale.

"...we could anger them..." "We will stop!" "Yes, cloning is no good!" "Cloning bad!, then." "It was crazy!"

"Crazy...?"

The fairies loved humans.

They longed for humans so much that when they started copying them, terrible things could happen.

So there was a day when they did that to me, but really, that was...

"Cloning at least is absolutely *bad!*, it is!"

With sourness on my mouth, I repeatedly pushed that viewpoint.

Perhaps having heard rumors, the fairies began steadily gathering.

For a while I watched their snack time with a smile, but now I had to go pick up the Assistant.

So, looking at my watch, I found that it had stopped at eleven.

"It broke..."

I could not tell the present time.

"Mister fairy, what time is it right now?"

"...daytime?"

What else.

Let us check the time on our own. Procuring a new watch also looked like a good thing to do. If I told Grandfather, I am sure he will come up with several. And because of that, I decided to drop by the office for a short while.

It happened on the way back.

An animal I was not used to seeing was sitting on the path ahead.

"....."

Seeing that animal, my thoughts muddled and grew fainter.

Animals were ordinarily seen wandering about human settlements, and there was a fair variety of them at that, but that animal left me a somewhat inorganic impression. That was why this happened, you see?

I was trying to scrutinize it very closely, but feeling a resistance hard to withstand and comparable to strong light in my eyes, I reflexively closed my eyelids down tight.

When I next opened my eyes, it felt like the silhouette of a girl was standing there—

This was weird.

However, the next time I blinked, it had gone back to being the animal that it was—

"Bow!"

It barked.

"A dog...?"

Once recognized as such, it could not be anything whatsoever except a dog.

The dog suddenly averted its gaze, and with his short limbs he left at a brisk trot.

"That was a weird... dog...?"

When the dog had disappeared from my sights, the sense that something was off also immediately disappeared.



I returned to the office and found that the time was twelve and thirty minutes.

I told about the damage to my watch, requesting a new one, but Grandfather made a sour face.

"...so you want a watch."

"I do not mind even if it is a pocket watch. After all, you own so many, Grandfather."

Grandfather was a collector in a variety of fields, he gathered a vast variety of things from ancient generations like guns and clocks.

"Wait. That's no good. If it breaks it won't be easy to repair."

"And is that not just fine. After all, they are all worn down." I uttered something negative in a roundabout way. "It is fine even if it is something without value, really?"

"...that stuff doesn't keep well... hummm... no, wait, what about that?"

Saying that he left the office, vanishing off somewhere.

Five minutes later he returned with a watch in his hand.

It was not kept in a box or anything. It was out in the open. It had to really be worthless, as he was swinging it carelessly about like a child would swing a tree branch.

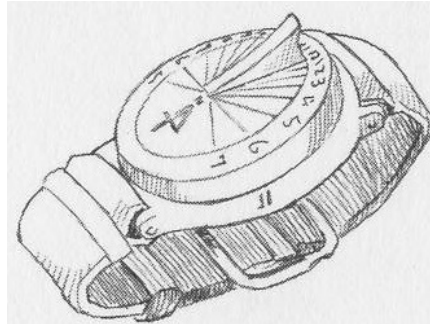
"This should do fine."

"Thank you very..... not."

I took back the gratitude I was saying, as looking at the wristwatch I saw it was a simply ridiculous thing.

"What exactly is this!"

"That's... a wrist sundial."



On its dial instead of hands there was a triangular protrusion stuck there.

"It is not even mechanical... uhm, is it really possible to accurately tell the time using this?"

"Take this compass with it. With both you can accurately determine the time. Only in clear daylight, though."

"Please give me a break... is there anything else... a little bit better..."

"Mastering the usage of a sundial might come in handy when things get rough."

"That is a situation that will definitely never come. I will go to my death wholly enveloped by the cradle of civilization."

"Gah, always asking for so much... fine, I get it, I'll procure something more appropriate eventually. So just bear with it for today."

For the time being I tried wearing that wrist sundial.

I of course did not know how to read it. Though handed a compass, I was at a loss. I could not make any practical use of this watch.

"Still, strange of you to own a thing like this..."

"That's, yeah... hum, how did it go... I just obtained it at some point," and he tapped his forehead with a finger around where his wrinkles were. "Oooh, right. I received it from some lady a long time ago."

"A lady...?"

"She was a pretty lady," he unemphatically said.

"Was that Grandmother?"

"No, she was not."

Grandfather plainly acknowledged that.

"Then an affair? You had Grandmother, and still—"

"No. That was before we met. And that was when I was still a youngster!"

Seeing him say that so indignantly, I must have poked a spot that he was quite regretful about.

"And that... how far did it go?"

I was not quite good at talking about matters of love.  
Despite that, the adultery of a flesh and blood relative was nothing I could disregard.  
"It didn't go anywhere. There wasn't anything of what you're imagining. The girl had unilaterally fallen in love with me, that's all."  
"Was it unclean?"  
"Why does it have to be. It was clean. Pure."  
"But really, forgetting her with a present like that... and worse, saying that it was fine when she did not present you with a mechanical watch. That is sad for that person at her first love."  
"...no, at times I replace the dial when it has worn down, I do keep it well, you see..."  
The voice with which he insisted was weak.  
"...untrue."  
"And first of all she wasn't my first love. She was beautiful, but we quickly broke off."  
My, what a moving tale...?  
"More importantly, take it and go. It's time. I also have to go get a tank."  
Stumbling on his lab coat he stood up.  
A tank? Like a gasoline one?  
"...well, if you have to go out, I wish that you would go pick him up while you are there."  
"I've no idea if the tank can help with that. If you bring him in, you will really do me a favor."  
"...huh."  
Still with some bad aftertaste I came to leave the Center behind. With a wrist sundial that served no purpose.  
This happened, well, more or less at twelve and forty minutes.



The distance between the Office and the Village square was, walking speedily, of about twenty minutes.  
If I hurried, I would make it there precisely around thirteen.  
That said, I was not quite in the mood to hurry.  
The fact that Assistant-san was (perhaps) a muscular young man was quite the hassle, and my step spontaneously grew slower.  
It was not that acting like that would make anything happen, really, on that aspect there was nothing to be worried about.  
The problem was me getting used to things.  
There are people who can be immediately open with others, but I believe I am exactly the opposite type of person. Time, that was what it took.  
With a person of the same sex, that time somewhat shortened.  
When age was distant, that time shortened further.  
As long as they did not have any strong idiosyncrasies, that time *wham!* stylishly contracted.  
At the very least, I myself still did not understand how to deal with the people who did not



belong. Should a time come when I did, as a woman I would be quite more presentable in public, however.

"Whew..."

If only Assistant-san had been just a few years younger, my mood would have improved a little, however.

"Master humaaan!"

When I had approached the grazing land in between the office and the Village, I was hit upon by a fairy who had spronged out from beyond a stone wall.

"Yes, yes, what is it?"

The fairy took out the yellow fruit he had on his back and lifted it up towards me.

"This is an offering!"

I received a banana on the smallish size.

"How come you are giving me this? Bananas are quite rare."

"....."

Maybe he did not hear me, as the fairy remained silent.

Well, given who they were, procuring a banana or two from somewhere should be simple.

"My impression is that of something you eat when you are sick, you see. If you could procure more of these, I could use the raw bananas to make all sorts of delicious things..."

And while I was having a meal of it—

"Now that I remember, you fairies do not eat fish, meat, or vegetables, my impression is that you never put anything in your mouths except sweets... but do you know that fruits can be included among the sweets?"

"How was it?"

"...it had no flavor, really?"

"It needs flavor?" he said, feeling like that was unexpected.

"In what meaning do you say that?"

It was like he was saying he had forgotten to put flavor in it, and I was very much bothered by what I had at that moment pushed into my stomach, whether it was truly something else or really a banana.

"Next one we be flavored."

"...this is not dangerous, correct?"

"Truthy so." (Translation: no, there's nothing.)

Then it was fine.

"Did you eat from the golden bottle?"

"Aye! It was all golden and shining, you know?"

"Right. Would it not be amazing if a present like that were given every day?"

"Would it!"

The fairy hopped down on the opposite side of the stone wall.

I could see a number of triangular hats bouncing around in the grass plain. In between the hats fidgeting about, a ball was being bounced around.

"We play ball."

I was no good with it myself, but I quite enjoy watching other people play.

I sat down on the stone wall and looked on for a while.

A slight wind that would not muss a hair was passing in the plains in between the human settlement and a gentle slope. The wind mixed the chilly smell of flowers in a marble pattern felt like it had the concept of time to it, as well, and just spacing out while sitting let me wallow in a vivacious mood.

I did not even notice it at all.

And so it was that these pleasant times passed by faster than subjectivity said.

Yes, this happened when it was already thirteen and forty minutes.

"Heeey! What're you doing there!"

Grandfather's angry voice yanked me back from young milady at the wall into slovenly granddaughter, and while I was there I was also dragged back by gravity and took a fall on my behind.

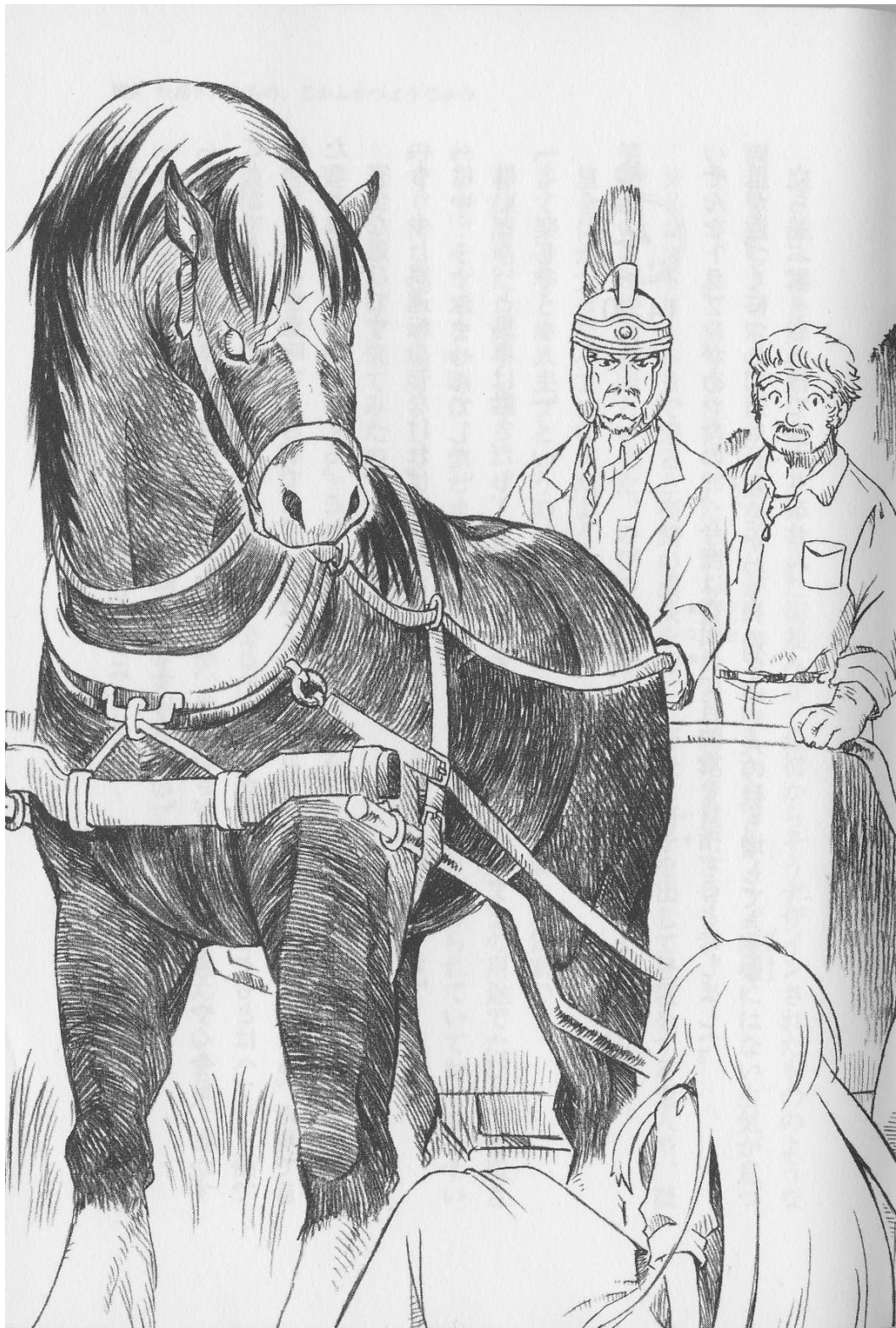
"OwChCh... g-, Grandfather?"

The instant I looked towards him I saw a horse carriage clopping up at a trot.

And it stopped right before my eyes.

"Wh-, wha-, wha-...?"

This was so out of there that I could not come up with words. The bizarrely macho dragging horse looked rowdy with his mysterious cross-shaped wound on his forehead, and he directed at me sharply-shining eyes that gave him an aura that said, *I live my days on the battlefield*.



"He's a large horse of the shire breed. Name's Deimos. He'd be a pulling horse by norm."

On the drawn battle carriage was Grandfather wearing a silver helmet.

There was another person, whom I did not know, riding with him. He was an elderly man with big and round eyes, wearing overalls that made him feel like a farmer, but that being said he was someone that loved this kind of games. Definitely a playmate.

"Ah, eh... what?"

"I asked you to go pick him up, didn't I. What're you spacing out here for. The time has long since passed, hasn't it? It's work, so why aren't you hurrying up and going?"

"O-, of course..."

"Sometimes, really, you—"

I received a tremendous scolding, which I reluctantly omit.

"...and so, what exactly is that thing?"

"A chariot."

He said that without a care.

It was an uniaxial horse-drawn two-wheel vehicle that must be rode standing.

"When you said 'tank' I wondered what it could be, so it was an ancient battle carriage..."

I did not know anything else about this.

"Properly it would take two horses, but Deimos-kun here is the hero of our Village boasting twenty horsepower, so dragging this much is not even a problem."

"This horse does have a shoulder height taller than my head, I must say..."

"That's his breed. The frame we could replicate, but there was no space for the horse. Today at long last we managed to get it moving. Around the twentieth century there was this tank called the Merkava, but as a word in Hebrew it means 'chariot'. To say it, this is the progenitor of the Merkava. To be able to replicate could be called a historic achievement. This here is living learning."

It was totally a game.

"We got to give it more of a test drive, so go now and pick him up."

"Yes... my apologies."

Heigh-ho, and the chariot began moving, advancing down the road.

"...his life looks like fun."



Having had that troubling thing, I decided that this time I would seriously head for my objective.

As one approached the Village the path also changed to be paved in stone, and people passing by also increased in number.

The houses standing in rows were not uniform, either.

The townscape was vividly painted white, red, and brown, but what made me feel a harmony such that it had to have been designed that way from the start were the long years of

acclimatization I had spent. They breathed with a vitality that ruins did not have, and made even a heavily indoor person like me feel a sensation close to relief.

On reaching the main street, with the depth of color of the road as background, we had older men with chairs outside their house taking naps and ladies exchanging pleasant conversations as examples of the people that could be seen living comfortably.

The impression was that the Village whole had become a large pub.

Now then, The Lamb and Olive should be the house-shop with their front in the round plaza ahead of here.

In the distant past it was a tavern, I had heard, and when bazaars or the likes were held, it was often made use of in the same way as at those times. When it was not, the hanging sign engraved with a lamb and an olive was easy to tell, and often used as meeting place.

And that was why I had come, but... there he was.

In front of the building, right below the sign. A terrifying youngster with muscles big enough to fill his shirt to bursting was standing stock still.

He took the alias of Mister Heracles. Right now. Inside me.

His mood perhaps hurt by the hour of delay, he had a sullen face as he crossed his arms.

He was very hard to talk to... but I simply needed to do that.

First of all I tried standing next to him at around ten meters of distance. ...yes, this did not look like I was lining up with him.

I closed the distance one meter per minute. It took around eight minutes before I reached a distance in which conversation was possible.

Except that taking flight would have changed nothing, so at that eighth minute I sorted through my feelings and talked to him.

"...excuse me... are you Mister Heracles?"

"Yeah?"

I made a mistake.

"Sorry, that was rude... you are Assistant-san, correct?"

"You asking me? I work the mail, but..."

I got the wrong person!

"M-, my deepest apologies!"

"Huh...?"

I ran away, leaving behind a bewildered young man.

After taking a good distance I discreetly looked at how things were going, and after around ten minutes an acquaintance of the young man's joined him, so they left the place behind.

With that, there was no one next to the house.

"...I was over an hour late... not inexplicable that he would disappear..."

Well then, where had he gone?

I so did not want to do this job that my idleness prolonged it overmuch, my mistake.

Supposing that Assistant-san would not go to the office of his own, it may be possible, then, that he was wandering about this neighborhood.

If so, then I had to go search.

These were, I believe, the events of about fourteen.



"Really don't know."

"Really never seen him."

"Really, we don't deal with that stuff."

Showing off what little Business Mode I had, I tried asking to the people of the Village, but I kept hearing the same thing on and on as to how they did not see any person that seemed to be Assistant-san.

And in the first place, I had never met him face to face. The efficiency of the search was therefore extremely bad.

"Hic?"

"Wyh~?"

"Mh~? Mister, you are drunk, I see."

Looking around the Village, I also asked to some people walking unsteadily, but they were all drunk (somehow...).

When they were not busy with farming, people seemed to really have nothing to do.

I returned to the outskirts of the Village and was at last able to encounter something connected to Assistant-san.

"Are you from the Office of Mediation?"

A lady in her late twenties touched my shoulder lightly.

"Yes? I am, so..."

Honey-colored golden hair was casually bundled in her back, and she was wearing a white labcoat that was comparatively rare for the present generation.

"Good. I've heard from around town that you've been searching."

I fully faced back to her,

"...then, are you my Grandfather's...?"

"No. I'm from the medical association. Your Assistant was kept in our care."

Being affiliated with the medical association meant that, like me, she was also affiliated with the United Nations.

"I am sorry. There have been problems, and I was late."

"It's my fault as well. He vanished quickly the instant I lifted my eyes from him... I'm also searching for him."

Perhaps teensy little disappearances like these were normal, as the doctor's face did not seem particularly flustered, rather her countenance was that of having half given up. From that I could also calm down a little.

"Well then, let us split up," I went.

"Then I will be having one more look around the Village."

"I shall be going to see if he has not headed into the woods."

"I wish he was more reliable. He is... very difficult to read."

The doctor spoke words with a similar nuance as the ones I heard from Grandfather. This was well and truly the kind who sought freedom, it appeared.

"Then let us meet up back at some meeting place in an hour."

"Of course."

We separated, the tip of our feet directed each towards our assignments.

The hill closest to the Village reminded of a scene straight out of a picture book.

Other than the sparsely growing trees, the majority was colored in the light green of pasture grass, and I could see as much of the scenery as I pleased.

I climbed to a little height, and when I turned around towards the side I came from, I could gaze down at the whole of Kusunoki Village.

I passed several gentle hills, and the terrain became gradually steeper until I entered the territory of the mountains. And as the terrain went into the distance, the ratio of the denser green of luxuriant tree leaves went increasing, and I could no longer distinguish it from the color of the grassland.

Incidentally, the area beyond these mountaintops, excluding a now nearly forsaken tributary to a national highway, was firmly settled by the majestic natural world.

However, it was of course not within the range of aimless wandering.

Regardless of how I could see far from my present location, I could not see any person. If there were, they would have to have gone in a little further. I could not see from here anyone having entered the woods.

"Would he have gone that far... I would say no."

Though I called them woods, they were part of a forest.

We only called the part with low density 'woods', nothing more.

Advancing within its depths without care for where one was going meant eventually one would get stranded.

"That would be very bad."

If that happened, this was going to become a big problem.

I went for the closest woods with somewhat hasty feet.

I did have a compass, but... the situation where that would become necessary would be the worst one. May the compass not be the Stranding Flag.

Deciding that I would return should the sunlight pushing its way through the foliage make spotted patterns at my feet, I stepped within.

There could be beasts inside here, understood?

Suddenly, a dumpling-shaped thicket of grass made a rustling sound, and I prepared myself.

"D'oh!"

One fairy frozen in a banzai pose hopped out like that pop-up pirate toy.

"...exhaustion."

I collapsed.

"What happened?"

"Nothing... humans are not particularly good with developments without logical connection, you see."

"You got it bad!"

"As far as having it bad I do have it bad, but... ahhh, right, you."

"Aye?"

I caught the fairy as he had climbed over my head and put him on my lap.

"Have you perhaps seen a boy around here?"

"Haven't!"

"So it appears he has not come around here."

"Or so you thought, but actually I have!"

"You saw him."

I dangled him in midair.

"Awhh!"

Fairies loved playing pranks, so he did not look like he particularly disliked it, however.

"So, where did you see him?"

"I did see a human, you know?"

Ah, could it be that these people cannot distinguish male and female?

That was quite the plausible thing.

"...well, could you just lead me to him, please? As a reward..."

I searched in my pockets and presented him with one of the candies that I had gotten from my share of the golden bottle.

"A candy... love them!"

Declaring love, are we.

"Then please tell me the place."

"Aye, come this way?"

He tumbled down from my lap then rushed out, headed for the depths of the woods.

Without even the pretension of calling me over, the fairy's skipping about staggered left and right, with a step resembling that of someone wandering a little tipsy and without a goal, and I became a smidge uneasy about whether he was really going to guide me to him.

That being said, I had nothing else to rely upon.

I emptied my head and stuck to him, and found the sunlight filtering through the trees shone in at an angle, the trees were lined evenly spaced, and that was us cutting diagonally through an ordered area.

Despite there being this much sunlight there was no undergrowth, and a smooth wooded floor was laid bare.

With the grace of something just like a naturally occurring rest stop, it was the most ideal location to take a seat while strolling and enjoying tea.

The fairy had disappeared.

"....."

Suddenly I felt like I had been thrown in a parallel world.

It was a wonderfully unfathomable instant in which reality and unreality felt like they could cross at any moment.

Maybe I was daydreaming, on the spot I could not judge.

Just a little bit, but this was a strange place.

What could it be, which could it be, why would it be. The sensation of my eyes spinning round and round nailed me on the spot.

"...well now?"

There was a voice that had the ring of a bell.

That released me from my self-imposed binding spell, and I ran my gaze on the surroundings.

A woman I had never met before appeared from beneath the trees.

She was of course a different person from that doctor.

She had a long, slender, well-proportioned body, a shapely area around her eyes, she looked like a refined person. Age seemed young. Mid-late teens or twenties or thereabout.



We remained petrified with our faces meeting. We both evidently were an unexpected encounter.

"Hello..."

Completely ignoring the meeting would be unnatural, so I tried a greeting.

She suddenly smiled and,

"A pleasant day to you. Were you out for a walk?"

A calm, clear voice addressed me that way.

"Yes... I am searching for someone."

"My. I am searching as well."

The lady touched her delicate fingers to her cheeks and smiled, looking troubled.

"Coincidences like that do happen."

"Truly."

She was an easy person to talk to.

There was no tension, I could feign my innocence with naturality.

"Are you searching around here?"

"No, I do not know anymore. He just might be around here, that is all. Uhm... could we have passed past by him?"

I asked that, and she shook her head.

"I see... going in any further we could get lost, so it might be best if we both called it off here."

Calling it off, I said, but this area had not yet been searched, and it would mean we were both wandering about the same place with the same goal...

"That is true. Could we both look around here a little?"

As I was thinking of proposing just the same thing, I quickly agreed and accepted her idea, so we decided to split this natural rest stop in more or less two areas and each have a look around them.

"I will take this part."

"Then I this."

A clean land with no tree roots jutting out was easy to walk on, a number of fallen leaves that was but countable did not even make the feet slip, and the search was progressing with quite the order. It was progressing, indeed, but unfortunately there was no change in the scenery. It was a tremendously odd place.

In the beginning I thought nature had created this rest stop, but now that I thought quite well, there was no place as unnatural as this.

Trees were placed at regular intervals.

This area alone had a flat ground.

The volume of light with no inclination, as if it was being controlled.

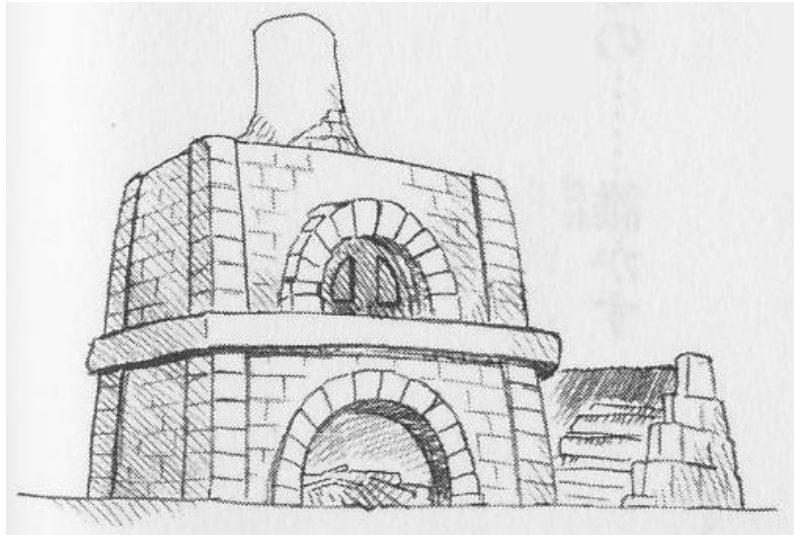
I had a feeling like the long and narrow space between the trees used a trick of the eyes to shine on the trees themselves, a trompe-l'oeil, but I fell into the mood of wandering between them.

—it was that fairy.

There was no need to reflect on that sense that something was off, as it took shape and appeared before my eyes.

"....."

It was a kamado – a traditional Japanese cooking stove.



It should have a fair bit of weight, but for some reason it was imposingly installed in this place, where it ought be difficult to carry to.

With something this big I could cook pizzas and sweets and even a whole pig, as long as I had the ingredients it looked like I would not have to worry about being stranded in this place. The only thing certain was, however, how this had not been installed as an anti-stranding device.

"...my, what a thing..."

Having likely finished searching her side, she came by.

She did not seem particularly moved by this impressive thing.

We gave it our gazes for a little while, but suddenly she went forwards and put her hand on the kamado's lid.

"Uhm...?"

"...just in case."

"It cannot be that he is hiding or lurking there or being imprisoned...?"

"Or worse, already been cooked?"

This woman was quite dark, indeed.

The kamado's lid made a rumbling sound as it opened.

"My, what a relief."

"...indeed."

There was nothing.

Disappointment seemed to be a common point between me and her at that point.

I was going to return to the office, report to Grandfather, apologize, take responsibility for everything, return home and maybe make some sweets—

The temptation was growing harder and harder to resist.

"My, there is a dog over there," went she (now that I say it, I did not even know her name).

"A dog?"

"That dog really concerns me."

She smoothly ran towards where the dog seemed to be. My gaze was obstructed by her, so I was unable to witness the figure of this dog.

It was to the point where it was rather her behavior that concerned me.

"The dog is – eEK?"

The right leg I had extended to chase after her went off of the control of consciousness and accelerated.

The toes that slipped on something that was not even ice eventually came to make a kick in the air, and accompanying it my body too lost its balance and came to be flung out in midair. I had slipped.

I realized quickly that I had stepped on something that had fallen on the floor. It did resemble the sensation of when I stepped on the wet leaves from the tree.

Now just what did I step on?

A corner of my sight rotating in slow-motion was crossed by an undulating, flimsy yellow object.

Myyy my, that indeed was – nothing less than the peel of a banana-na-na.



"Ow-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch..."

The behind I hit hard hurt like it was throbbing, my back hurt like it was numb, my head hurt like it was splitting... but even though visited by that abundant variety of pains, the most unpleasant thing was my disheveled hair.

During my tumble it got in between the ground and my body, and the pain I tasted felt like it was being ripped off. I wanted to cut it. But it was difficult to find a reason to shorten hair left growing without a reason, either.

"Jeez", and "seriously", and "really", my spinal reflexes spat out those unremarkable curses as I caressed my hair.

"...now then."

The fray fixed, the time of the joint pain vanishing came, and at last my head began working. Well, what to do?

Where was this place, and who was I?

Oooh, it seemed I had a slight confusion in my memories.

I was being 'I', the location... well, of all things, if that round building I am so used to was not towering right before my eyes.

I knew the name of the building. It was called the Kusunoki General Cultural Center.

Why, if it was not the Office.

"Everything I see is blurry..."

All things I could perceive by sight had their contours shaking.

Of course, what was blurry was not the world, it was me. I hit my head a bit, it must have been from that.

First of all, let us head to the office.

I presented my apologies to the reception unmanned year round, and with heavy *hoo-haa* breathing I climbed up the spiral staircase. For some reason the clapping sound of my shoes was doubled and overlapping.

Perhaps even my ears had gone crazy, or perhaps some abnormality had visited my dear mister brain which stood at the root of it all.

Third floor. Front of that office I am so used to going to. The door had nothing written but a very simple *United Nations Mediators Committee*, and its knob, simultaneous with my hand, was grasped by the different hand of someone else.

I lifted my face to examine the owner of the arm, and there stood I.

"....."

From a face I often saw in the vicinity of mirrors came a voice unlike that which normally I hear through the skull, a refined bell-like sound—

"...are you kidding me?"

That was my voice, but by the time I thought that, I was knocked over by a strong vertigo. I thought I was about to scream out.

However, once I regained my presence, there was no unrealistic being such as another me there, and instead there was the relief and the awkwardness of having woken up from a nightmare, accompanied by a scream still in the root of my tongue, which left me with quite the bitter aftertaste. The taste of neurotransmitters, or something.

"...right... the watch..."

My memories were returning.

I once again extended my arm towards the doorknob, and found that in the darkness lurking at the edge of the third floor corridor there sat a dog.

"That dog, feels like I have seen him somewhere..."

It was a worn-down building, so a dog could plausibly have strayed inside.

What to do. Should I approach him, should I ignore him. I somehow had the irresistible urge of picking the choice of approaching him, though my motives were not certain.

"Bow!"

The dog barked once and suddenly went off somewhere, leaving me still at a loss.

As he did I also felt relieved, and could twist the hand that I had laid on the doorknob.

In the office there was Grandfather as usual.

"Grandfather."

"What is it?"

"My wristwatch has broken, I would like a new one."

So I consulted him with, but Grandfather promptly made a sour face, showing me a stance of refusing to let go of his clock collection.

In the end, he could not fully refuse a request from his adorable granddaughter, and quickly went out to search for a suitable item. But as it happened—

"Look at this. I had something nice."

So Grandfather went, but as his eyes stopped on my wrist, he immediately gave me cold eyes.

"...oi, what is that?"

"Excuse me?"

Told I tried lifting up my wrist, and found there was something I had never seen before wound on it.

A wrist sundial. That was what it was.

"When did you steal it?"

"Ah, well..."

Steal it?

No, I received the wrist sundial from Granfather, and... oh dear?

"Mh? What? Is this not odd?"

"Don't try telling me you don't have any memories of stealing it."

"I do not!"

"Like hell you don't! What the hell is this, beating me to what I wanted to give you and stealing it!"

In my memories I did receive it, but taking it without authorization I would not even do while sleepwalking.

Restraining his anger, I tried explaining.

"...in the first place, you see, if I wanted to lift from your collection, Grandfather, I would have gotten a proper possibly valuable mechanical-type watch rather than this useless thing. If I had stolen, I would have stolen much better!"

My opinion regarding my sincere stealing attitude seemed to have convinced Grandfather.

"...that's true."

That sort of hurt me.

But next came Grandfather's turn to be puzzled.

"So when did I give you this?"

"Not long ago... or that is how it does not feel like?"

Our faces met and we both *hmmm'd*.

"...this is confusing. Well, whatever, take it. It's yours in every sense of the word."

"Ah, no, I want to say that I would like something I can actually tell time with. This dodgy-looking thing I am refunding."

Of course, my refund was not accepted.

Worse, I came into the awkward situation of hearing that the thing had a connection with Grandfather's first love or whatever, spending time wastefully.

Regardless, there was no change in how I had to go pick up Assistant-san, so, still with a wrist sundial I did not know how read, I came to head for the meeting place.

...so, just what time was it right now, exactly?



The distance between the office and the Village square was, walking speedily, of about twenty minutes.

Under the sign with a sheep that had a branch with a fruit added to it there was a burly male meaningfully waiting, but I had a feeling like it was not him.

I surveyed my surroundings with a cool head, and a couple fighting at a location somewhat distant from the sign attracted my eyes.

It was a young couple.

The lady in the white labcoat was first of all unmistakably in her late twenties, however I could not immediately read the age of the male.

He was a mysterious man.

At a glance he did not look like the type one would judge attractive, rather the opposite, if one did not really concentrate one's attention, he would be unable to leave any impression, so much he was lacking in vigor.

We called someone who lacks a sense of presence as being "like air", and he precisely personified that term.

Age, characteristics, clothes, everything was vague.

Despite how even then his figure was burning into my eyes, every time I closed them even his face felt like it was slipping from my memories.

How to say it... he was unrealistic.

"...well now?"

Moved by something like a prediction I tried addressing them with my voice, and what a center hit it was.

"You see, I'm a doctor staying in this village. I was also in charge of his medical checkup... but more importantly, you came just with the perfect timing! He was just about to go off wandering. What a problem that would've been."

"Wandering?"

"Exactly. Normally he's calm, but occasionally he just up and begins roaming about. At times he even moves to places really far away."

What I thought was them fighting was just the scene of the doctor not letting Assistant-san's arm go as he was about to go off somewhere.

"Normally he's so docile... help me!"

"Ah, yes."

I rushed to the arm on the opposite side of the one the lady doctor was holding.

With no experience of fighting scenes, I made both my arms clumsily wound on his, and just barely managed to secure him.

"OK, that's fine!"

Now just what was this all about.

With freedom taken from both his arms, Assistant-san made like a child who refused to be taken away, and took to his knees on the spot. He moved about in every which direction, attempting to struggle to run away.

"He should calm down quickly, could you hold him until he does?"

"Sure..."

My head could not follow the development, and could do no more than return a half-hearted reply.

"So, while we wait for that, would you listen to me, just to spend time?"

She was really used to this sort of things. She was completely unfazed.

And she looked like she was truly enjoying herself.

Now that I looked at it, her arm lock was at a glance perfect. She was used to it. She was skilled. It could be said that something other than medicine had allowed her to train that skill, indeed. I was really glad I had not become a doctor.

"Right, even about your first love."

"....."

Now how did it end up that I carefully asked a lady whom I had just met and with whom I was making an arm lock, this lady with the glossy blond hair, about her first love?

"Ahhh, but more importantly... I do not quite know much about him."

"You don't? Then I must speak to you about him."

Succeeding in my course correction, I felt relief.

"First thing, he... had a peculiar upbringing, are you aware of that?"

"Yes. Just that."

"When he was discovered, he was alone. He could not speak words, he had no relatives nor friends... what was surprising is that he seemingly had nothing to eat either."

"No food...?"

"His family was the last one of his race. Him and his family, that is."

What she spoke of was this scenario.

It was one of the groups that lived a self-sufficient life, distant from the blessings of civilization.

They were originally people who, for whatever reason, had not joined any agricultural group. As one of their choices, they adopted a life of nomadism.

For several generations, that went fine.

Although their standard of living had fallen, their livelihood was stable.

The few bits of knowledge they had inherited from a scientific civilization that was about to reach its peak could likely be used even in their primitive life.

They gathered food, raised farm animals, cooked, weaved textiles, and depending on things they may even have been able to cultivate.

Their former glory had fallen down to the level of their wisdom of life.

As generations passed, the world changed.

To children who had forgotten the true face of science the wisdom of science was no theory, it was ritual.

They were convinced it was a precious gift their ancestors had extracted from all things in Creation.

Take for example the construction knives inherited from their grandfathers.

They were of course unable to replicate them. Just where did this mysterious sharp-edged tool come from? Maybe Heaven, maybe earth, maybe fire, maybe water, maybe God, maybe the devil.

Oooh, this thing called a cola bottle is truly marvelous, it can tan fur, it can contain water, it can be blown like a flute, it had so many uses that it was treated like a sacred treasure. It was so convenient that if one's attention slipped, it might plausibly return to be one with God.

Their generations went on.

That came with forgetting the term 'practicing'.

They forgot molecular biology, let engineering slip through their hands, lost geography (by mistake they threw it in the fires of their kamados. People bring several maps when they go for voyages, correct? I am certain it was just one of them), medicinal epidemiology was convenient so it might have remained, chemistry too if mixed with their lifestyle would have secretly managed to survive, and with regards to physics / metaphysics / informatics / mathematics there was nothing to do but give up. Astronomy, too, except for reading the stars it might only have kept for a few generations.

And thus did the group decline.

However, even with that, if compared to the great ingenuity put to work by the ancient pasturers, it could be said that it was still easy for them to live.

If we are to say the sole and only point in which they were lacking compared to the former pasturers, that was commerce.

For whatever reason they, having escaped from the villages of people as they had, found it easy to consider contact with other tribes as taboo. As a result, they lost commerce, the best

vitamin for a nomadic nation.

A skin lacking vitamins becomes chapped by the moment.

They could no longer obtain high quality knives. Nor even the simpler tools. As they were located on an isolated plateau, that went all the more. What they could obtain was meat and fur and milk and wild grass, bone and skin.

It was barely possible to continue maintaining a civilization with those, but eventually their number decreased.

No second coming of the powerful Mongol Empire could be expected.

Former Humanity had lost far too much of its vigor to replicate that.

Their fellows dying out, in the end they became a single family, and then even the parents died away.

He was the last child.

Without anyone to teach him words or grant him defense... all alone, living by eating grass and chewing fruits.

As he barely knew how to live, he had plenty of spare time.

He was bothered as to what sort of person he was, but he had no words to deepen those thoughts.

He looked up at the sky, gazed at the ground, thought about the vastness of the world. Could it be possible that at times he met with fairies?

He continued thinking with only pure feelings, and then—

And then he was put into custody.

"...all of which is a conjecture of your grandfather's, do understand."

"So that is what it was."

I was embarrassed for feeling that he was going to be hard to deal with without even meeting him once.

We were help for him, this I felt strongly.

"This has been solemn and intimate, I suppose. I apologize. He, for all that, still became a person of abundant emotivity. Before he was more like that... close to nothing, I could say..."

"Nothing?"

Another odd word had come up.

"Exactly. When I first met him, he didn't have a name, you know."

"I see. He had no name so he was called 'Nothing'."

"Not at all. I didn't mean it like that. Now how do I explain it... in the beginning I called him Nu. Nu from Numerical."

"...he was turned into a number."

I repeated the words that she had uttered in other terms.

"He was a being transformed into numerical form. His height, weight, blood type, pulse rate, blood pressure and other data, with all that considered, his existence couldn't be doubted. I recorded them so there's no mistakes. But every time, as soon as I let my eyes off of him, he keeps slipping from my consciousness and memories. He makes me forget."

"....."

I could not even nod back, I was standing stock still.

"It's true. Fine, you don't need to believe me. Your grandfather... he seemed very interesting, so I was wondering how his granddaughter was doing."

"This is not going to end with you just being a forgetful person, is it, miss doctor?"



Having that pointed out, she made an awkward smile.

"...I do think I'm forgetful, yes. But it's not like that. I genuinely can't preserve my memories of the overall perspective of him. Numbers I can tell. If I look in my memories, the existence of a person is self-evident. But as impressions go... facial features, voice timbre, physical characteristics and all that, the memories of all those parts come loose the instant I take my eyes off. It's like he has no shape."

Indefinite.

What immediately came to my head was that term.

"...ridiculous," I shook it away. "He just more or less lacks individuality, of course?"

"Not more or less. He's unindividual to absolute extents. People are remembered for their personality, right? Since the purity of his unindividualness is too high, I'm sure no one would be able to keep him in their memories. This world is like that, definitely."

Impossible.

In a habit I often engage whenever I feel hopeless, I met my hands before my mouth and sunk into thought. It felt like there were as many ways to deny that as I pleased, but I felt an unpleasant unease.

"You... hands."

"What?"

Unable to understand what was being sought of me, I flipped my hands rapidly before my eyes.

"You let him go..."

"Ah... but."

I pointed at the lady doctor's hands, which were also free.

"W-, where is he? Where's Nu-kun?"

As was obvious, Assistant-san had long since vanished.



No matter whom we asked at the village, they all said that they had no memories of that boy. As if proving the lady doctor's unlikely words now, right after her mistake, the complete nonexistence of witnesses forced us into the choice of searching by our own selves. According to what we spoke of at that point, I was to follow the road towards the office and check the wide grazing lands at its sides, while the lady doctor would check nearer the Village, so we each had our own destinations.

*Assistant-san has a habit of wandering*, was how she went.

Worse, he sometimes moved quite far.

Though I could still easily look far into the grazing lands, once he went towards the ruins or the forest, I would absolutely never find him alone.

I returned up the road at a run, quickly ran out of breath and stood there, still prodded into

moving by my hurry I did so at a jog, and then I was once again tired and put my hands on my knees... and that was what I kept repeating.

Rather, I meant to go all the way back to the office just like this and report everything to Grandfather.

This required the aid of the experienced.

"...I wonder why, but... I feel oddly hungry..."

Has to be how I used energy I normally did not use to blame, indeed.

I felt an unease like my body was lacking gas.

"Master humaaan!"

A fairy was standing on top of a stone wall.

Ahhh, but right now I could not deal with him... I will speak with him until I regain my breathing, then take my leave.

"Yes, yes, what is it?"

When I did, the fairy tended me the banana he had on his back.

"This is an offering!"

It was a banana on the smallish size.

"How come you are giving me this? Bananas are quite rare."

"....."

Maybe the fairy had not heard me, as he remained silent.

Well, given who they were, procuring a banana or two from somewhere should be simple.

Now that I thought of it, bananas were easy to digest, and had a perfect score on energy too, I heard.

It was a timely gift I was thankful for.

"My impression is that of something you eat when you are sick, you see. If you could procure more of these, I could use the raw bananas to make all sorts of delicious things..."

I ate it—

"How was it?"

"Well, delicious."

I was made happy by a peculiar sense during eating of sweet meltiness.

"Then we'll use this from the next one on!"

"What do you mean by those words?"

"Who knows?"

Now just what was this feeling.

This exchange gave me a strong sense of *déjà vu*.

"...uhm, now what was I going to do?"

"Asking about the meaning of people being alive?"

"No, not that profound a question..."

"Attempting to converse with yourself?"

Converse with myself?

"By the way."

An aside from what?

The sound of hooves came in from somewhere, the fairy spoke out a disappointed "...awww", and hopped down, facing the opposite side of the stone wall.

I wanted to flop down with my limbs spread wide like I had exhausted my entire life.

They were beings that did like this, they appeared unexpectedly and vanished like mist disperses. It appeared that the tools that they made had been given with the same nature.

It was truly rare for the tools they made to remain behind long. Even keeping up with them, at

some point they just vanished. Like they had some Disappearance function woven into them from the beginning.

To use words that were sort of set phrases, the fairies' tools were "hard to believe", or "impossible to predict at a glance", something with those meanings. In fact, although what they produce looked like tools at a glance, they concealed functions impossible to imagine. And that was why... the peel of the banana I had eaten vanishing in some crack, even that was plausible, I could say...

This happened immediately afterwards.

"Heeey! What're you doing there!"

"...Grandfather."

An ancient war chariot dragged by a tremendously big horse parked right before my eyes.

Grandfather was riding it with a displeased face.

What unfolded after that you can vividly guess down to the sentence.



There was the predictable scolding during which he said I had to go pick up Assistant-san on the double.

I headed for the village at a hurry. The time was what the time was. I just wanted to get this job done already.

I had a feeling like I had spent a tremendous amount of time in my continuing search for Assistant-san.

My head was all a daze, and I hoped I had not caught a cold.

Next to the building designated as meeting place, The Lamb and Olive, I could not spot anyone who seemed likely to fit. I did not see the doctor, either.

I set my heart and resolutely asked the people nearby, but there was no testimony that would make for a clue.

At a loss as I was, a lady talked to me.

"Are you from the Office of Mediation?"

It was the doctor, the one who had entrusted me with the search.

Hearing from her about Assistant-san's disappearance, we made the barest of self-introductions and then split up to search.

I came out from the village, stepped across the hills from the grazing land, and decided to make it to the wood thicket at the foot of the mountains. As I could see far, I estimated that if he had strayed in there I would find him quickly, because if I continued further and entered even the woods, I was worried that the attempt of discovering him would become desperate. As I advanced, the trees that were dotted around grew denser, and when it transformed into a proper woods, I stopped my feet.

"...correct?" "...preparations..." "...this place..." "...the ingredients..." "...perfect..." "...if they slipped..."

From nowhere in particular came the whispered voices of fairies.

There were none around, there were only their voices.

It appeared that quite a few fairies were nearby.

I hesitated, wondering whether I should talk to them or avoid doing so, but next a human voice reached my ears.

Just for now, humans took higher priority, so my attention was drawn towards that.

"Hellooo?"

A voice saying that they were seeking someone they could not see.

Being a remote and difficult to reach place, it seemed improbable someone would be here searching for someone else. The doctor should be at the village, and being that I was here, it naturally appeared that the call came from the actual disappeared person, Assistant-san.

...it felt a little bit high-pitched for being a male voice, however.

My line of sight was interrupted by the trees, so what I could see had quite the narrow range. I did try relying on the spaces between tree and tree to peek through, but even those gaps between trees were sealed by the trees trunks even further in the back, a situation which, to tell the truth, made all of that a wasted effort.

No matter where I advanced to, all I could see was the same scene.

The woods had trees distributed at even spaces, so no matter what location I looked from, the scene and the extent I could see had been made identical. And by somebody's hand.

The illusion of looping through the same place endlessly spread like a fire with me at the center, but much faster than the one that would be lit if sparks were to fall on the dead branches and light them.

"Doing something like this... would he do something like his, I wonder...!"

While wheezing out of breath I moved on through the maze.

Though I did so because I inferred that someone was there, the instant I spotted a person standing beyond the tree trunks I happened to let out a voice of surprise.

"...well now?"

Standing right there was a woman I had never met before.

She was of course a different person from that doctor.

She had a long, slender, well-proportioned body, a shapely area around her eyes, she looked like a refined person. Age seemed young. Mid-late teens or twenties or thereabout.

We remained petrified with our faces meeting. We both evidently were an unexpected encounter.

"Hello..."

It would have been very much unnatural not to address her at that point, I thought, but as it came she greeted me first, so I answered by putting on my best smile.

"A pleasant day to you. Were you out for a walk?"

She was also searching for someone.

We once again came to split into two parties. While savoring an intense sense of déjà vu, I wandered about the area that was my responsibility.

"....."

Already at this time, suspicion was swirling within me.

There was no mistake, this was the world of the fairies.

This was an all too peculiar situation that they constructed by slipping it through the real world.

I had a feeling like every time I increased our friendship as a Mediator, I was dragged little by little deeper and deeper into their world.

"My life at least should be relatively speaking safe, I believe."

The fairies pushing ill will directly in my way in the first place unthinkable.

But there was that terrible experience I had via one of the tools they made, and it was dangerous to convince myself that my safety would be necessarily guaranteed.

What was required was cautious behavior.

For all that, that woman from before... though I had properly spoken to her, at present she left no impression on me.

Face, height, looks, mood... maybe vague, maybe indefinite.

I stopped my feet and thought.

However there was no sign that the truth would manifest itself clearly, so these doubts that gave me an uncertain feeling did nothing but make dark clouds swell outwards. A sense of physical discomfort had reasons and causes. Should I even somehow try to carve it out in tangible ways, it would end with being a back-breaking labor as hollow as cat pictures.

Still, exactly what was I doubting?

The instant I resumed walking, I tumbled.

The ground beneath my feet was at that moment absent.

—awww, I slipped again.

I looked up at the sky above like what was happening to me was happening to someone else. All that in other words was because, though I was about to *ba-plump* fall on my back, my face was turned upwards.

A corner of my sights as they rotated in slow-motion was crossed by an undulating, flimsy yellow object – the peel of a banana.

As I was slipping, I came to kick the sky, you see. Mysteriously, I felt no surprise.

As I expected, was all I thought.



Without any logical continuation I found myself laying down on the grass.

"But...?"

I slipped and tumbled and lost consciousness. That was in my memories.

So... what about before that...?

It was like I could not remember. Forget the mere details, I had lost sight of the outline of what I should have been doing.

Assistant-san...

I was going to pick up Assistant-san.

I had no idea what face he had, regardless I had to go pick him up no matter what. The reason was that he—

"That he...?"

The jolt of an emotion like compassion swam within me.  
How could I possibly be feeling compassion for someone I did not know?  
...that was not implausible. Mr. Assistant had been held in a remote and isolated environment, the last one left alive. Losing the parents that had raised him early, his upbringing was one that did not let him understand words.  
"Yes, he is truly pitiable."  
But what does the person himself think, I wonder?  
To think that, I had to imagine a world without words.  
He had no words. Perhaps when he was born he heard some, but by the time he had reached an age where he could understand what was going on around him, he had lost that. Words were organization, therefore, without someone to educate him, he should have been unable to do anything about it. Should he even have had superb educational books, he could not learn from them of his own strength.  
That required analysis, and analysis had a different language. Without it, it would be required to generate a language from zero, which would definitely take a long time.  
Assistant-san had no words. That said, ingenuity is Man, therefore it had to be somewhat – good enough for number two in the world – high.  
If ingenuity was high, but one lacked words, could one think about things in detail? Relying on instinct and needs alone, would one not only act as a wild beast?  
No, I was certain one would seek thinking.  
What could thoughts without words be like?  
Thoughts spread farther than viral diseases, brewing something unlike ideology. Former Humanity 'blundered' many times with that, suffering serious injuries, inflicting them, discriminating, separating, and being on the receiving end of all those things, indeed.  
A boy living all alone on grasslands had no words but high intelligence.  
He had means to live at a minimum level, and there were no great dangers.  
Did he... did he think that there was something insufficient in his life?  
Put into custody, transferred to a village of people, not really being able to get used to it, and without remembering words.  
Why would the outbursts of wandering that occasionally came to him happen?  
When people wandered about, did they so because they had something of an objective... so I felt that I already knew the answer to that. Just thinking about what I was doing right at that point...  
I found a woman standing at the side of the stone wall.  
How she faced the stone wall and talked to it felt like there was something vaguely cold. No, that was not monologuing...  
I approached her.  
I came close to her back with long strides like some ruffian.  
I laid a hand on her shoulder and asked with a firm voice, "*hello!*"  
When I did she gave me a confused "*what?*" of a voice and turned to face me, but seeing the face she had even I was startled.  
I was going to take a step back, but an invisible power seized me, dragging me at her side. Resistance was futile. My body was unfree down to the single finger, and our heads were accelerating, drawing an impact course with each other. Impact.

"Bow."

A dog barked somewhere.

"...it... does not hurt?"

I was standing stock still alone, right at the edge of the path.

"What happened?"

"My... a fairy."

I lowered my gaze and discovered a fairy on top of the stone wall.

Though my memories of until a moment ago were confused, I remember seeing this scene.

"I was just conversing with you here. Correct?"

For some reason I asked that questioningly.

"Yes... master detective."

And again for some reason this fairy hung his head while talking.

"And you people are again scheming out some big prank, right?"

"...ahhh."

"It is about time you took a weight off your shoulders and spoke of it, how about?"

"Be nice if I could," and the fairy suddenly took out a banana. "Wanna eat?"

"....."

Right, a banana.

I had a feeling that that banana was odd.

And just what was a banana to begin with. It was nothing beyond a simple fruit. No matter how far I searched for some deep meaning, a banana remained utterly a banana.

In the end I ate it.

"Mh, delicious. So are banana cakes."

"Ah!"

The fairy was in anguish.

"...banana chocolate parfait."

"Ah! Ah!"

The fairy twisted himself like he could not bear this.

"Chocobanana."

"Ah! Ah! Ah!"

He casually tumbled down and began rolling back and forth.

"Eclair with a whole banana."

"eRoough!"

*What about this?, is this any good?*, and going with the momentum of things I proposed various banana sweets, and every time the fairy became worse.

"...thinking like this, these things have good affinity with chocolate, do they not."

Awww, I sooo wanted to make some. It would be nice if I could use them at any time, from the fridge or something.

As I sunk a little in the world of hobbies, the fairy disappeared. "Looking forwards to it!," only that voice vaguely remained in my ears.

Now that I looked, a carriage-like thing was on the way towards me from the direction of the village.

They did not overtly gather whenever there were humans except for me.

In the stead of the vanished fairy, I spotted an odd dog. It was a dog that, how to say it, held a hard-to-describe terror from outer space. Looking at him he seemed cute, but it was like I could not feel vitality from him. He seemed to have no ill will, but that conversely strengthened the sense that he was an unknown.

"That dog... again."

The dog's gaze was directed at me. That said, when I returned that gaze he pulled back and walked away, as if to say that our eyes just happened to meet.

With the fairy and the dog both vanished it felt like all that surrounded me instantly regained the weight of reality, and an audibly quiet tranquility filled the air. That said, that too went for only an instant.

"Heeey! What're you doing there!"

So as to scold me for shirking the pick-up, the ancient war carriage that Grandfather was riding smoothly came towards me, and that mood of Reality was turned into tiny pieces.

Having had that troubling thing happen to me, I decided that this time I would seriously head for my objective. As one approached the Village the path also changed to be paved in stone, and people passing by also increased in number. The houses standing in rows were not uniform, either. The townscape was vividly painted white, red and brown, but what made me feel a harmony such that it had to have been designed that way from the start were the long years of acclimatization I had spent—

I had a feeling like I was retracing a scene I had already seen.

A vicarious experience, it put me in a mood like I was standing on the border of a dream.

To explain simply, and doing so by at least skipping scenes already seen once, I had come to the village and searched for Assistant-san, depending on divergence I actually found him or did not, met the lady doctor in charge, and in the end we split into two search parties and I headed to the woods.

And so, right now I was walking the woods.

To find Assistant-san, someone I did not even know down to the face.

With things ending like this, what if what I sought right now was no longer Assistant-san himself, but something that had the concept of 'Assistant-san' to itself?

A really silly delusion passed past me.

Eventually I came out in front of a kamado.

It was an astonishing new development. A kamado, a cooking stove, was installed in the middle of the woods.

"...hummm."

It should have a fair bit of weight, but for some reason it was imposingly installed in this place where it ought be difficult to carry to... yes, well, it was not a particularly big issue. Plausible, plausible.

"...my, what a thing we have..."

And as I was doing this and that, she came.

Although we poured or gazes at each other for a short while, abruptly she came forwards and was about to lay her hand on the kamado's lid, so,

"Excuse me... is it not fine like this already?"

"...indeed."

I had a teensy bit of opposition towards events proceeding as established.

Especially given how, inside there, there was not the concept of 'Assistant-san' roasted whole.

"Dear me, in a place like this...?"

A third woman came by.

She seemed a little puzzled at how the two of us were already there, but in the end she accepted that and joined our conversation like nothing had happened.





Three women made a something something.

For some reason they did not feel foreign, and the conversation was lively.

"That is true, I am searching for someone." "So am I, I must say." "Truth is, so am I" "I had to pick up Grandfather's Assistant." "So did I, I must say." "Truth is, me too."

Had there been people listening from the side, what a mess they would think this was.

Being on the side of the participants was quite fun.

In a corner of my awareness there was the admission that this was odd, that was true... but I guessed that that was all irrelevant.

Maybe the three of us all had the same mental environment, I thought.

First of all my partners' faces being indistinct despite the fact that we were facing each other and conversing was an unusual event.

We talked about a great many things.

I was forgetting every bit of that talk, meaning some sort of odd phenomenon was occurring, but I was not particularly anxious about it.

On the other hand, this place let me handle stress quite well, so I could forget about the tiny little things.

"More importantly, do you not think that we can just up and use this kamado?" "I also think that." "I was thinking I would like to bake a pizza, even just once." "As long as we have the ingredients." "We could start bringing them in right now." "I would rather bake a massive number of cakes..."

In the middle of the conversation I suddenly slipped.

The peel of the banana that I had eaten earlier cut across my sights, and I gazed at it without particular surprise.

My consciousness suddenly blacked out.



I was moving at high speed, headed for the scene where Grandfather scolded me.

The figure of my Grandfather riding a chariot was like a surreal joke, and I could not forget it.

With the huge horse nearby I dejectedly hung my head, put my hands together in front, and

took the *I am being scolded* pose, but inside I did not have much regret. If I said so myself, then there was no mistake.

I zoomed past the grass field, headed towards the two with tremendous speed.

It was not like my flesh and blood body was running, it appeared I might be drawing 'nearer' using different, more unscientific means.

Right before I bumped into myself, I heard the bark of a dog going 'bow' just once.

"Besides, you are—"

The next thing I noticed was me being scolded by Grandfather.

As ever the memories of right before were indistinct, however I was able to predict that this was an event that would happen.



A fine and beautiful day off, the scene of the village was capturing that as it was.

Within it, I went walking seeking 'Assistant-san'.

I knew I would not find him, but I still let my body move. Just like I was running down a rail.

I walked around for a while, and when I returned to the outskirts of the village, there I encountered the doctor lady.

It seemed she might be noticing the recursion, if just a little bit, as when she saw me, she made a face like I was odd.

According to the flow of things, we should be at our first encounter.

About half of my consciousness acknowledged being yes-indeed at my first encounter with the lady doctor before me. It was the feeling that we were being enveloped from the start by this period of time.

The hesitation, which made me wonder whether we were actually acquainted, ought be first targeted skeptically and investigated, however... I could not think in that way in the slightest. It was clear that I was confused.

Still, what about the doctor lady?

Even if she had not been visited by a confusion as strong as mine, examining her facial expression I found there was something hard to swallow stuck right at the tip of her throat.

But first of all, in order to safely get past this scene, I awaited her self-introduction.

"...suppose in a separate world nobody existed except for you, how would Assistant-kun manage to reflect upon himself, I wonder?"

So began the doctor lady.

Forcing away the awareness that said that according to the flow of things we were at our first meeting, she cut to the core of things.

"If humans are cut off from the environment, they're unable to gain words, correct? Children thrust early in their lives into an outdoorsy lifestyle lacking contact with others, well... it's not just the words, the development of their emotional side will also be stunted. They're lacking

the majority of basic human emotions."

"It was only recently that 'Assistant-san' has been put into custody, was it?"

"That isn't really the case, still his health wasn't especially good so he's been under constant and continual treatment. He has a weak constitution, you see. It was only recently that he's been able to receive an education program. His disposition is meek so whatever we did he didn't rebel, but we couldn't improve his tendency to have problems interacting with others. It's just..."

The doctor lady cut off her words, and I began closely scrutinizing what came out of her mouth next.

"Essentially, he was very wise. That's in an innate sense."

"Meaning that while he does not have words, he has a high capacity for thinking?"

"That's right. However, his presence is lacking, and it's nearly impossible for him to face things down as a person and let himself be interacted with by others. Your grandfather reached the same conclusion, you see. As far as awareness, I could understand that I was next to Assistant-kun and helping him with eating and changing clothes, but... my consciousness gradually let him pass past me..."

"Like an invisible person. On top of that, he has no words."

"Right? Say, once left within that loneliness, how do you think he could control himself? Is there anything he can do, I wonder? Normally speaking he would be as if raised in social withdrawal, right? But he's wise."

"He wished for a wisdom lacking in individuality..."

I just wondered.

No matter how hard I thought, there could never be an answer to a problem of the heart within the ordinary person I was. What I could answer with was something simple, so much it embarrassed me to utter it.

"First thing, what do you think of him wishing for individuality? A self, a character..."

"Yes, yes. That's right. That's how it would be. He desires individuality."

It was like she had predicted that reply, and of course I felt a little ashamed. The lady doctor's goal did not seem to be making fun of me, and she said something that surprised me.

"I have a feeling that he's searching for that."

".....and where would he have dropped this 'individuality'?"

I ended up spewing airheaded nonsense like a fairy.

"He thinks he has! I'm sure of it!"

The doctor lady was max serious.

"You do not just drop something like that somewhere!"

"I don't think that, either!"

"He is smart, is he?"

"And that's why he might be searching for himself in a free way of thinking that a normal person would never ever think of!"

"Well..."

Now just what was it with her... I lost my words.

"His world is still uncertain and vague! And that's why... something so inexplicable... is happening...?"

Awww, what a terribly idealistic conversation. I myself was right in the middle of a mysterious experience, and so my feelings were more and more chaotic. In the end,

"This 'Assistant-san' person might never have existed from the beginning."

"Taking a flight from reality with a smile that nice is sort of troubling."

"Now that I remember, my Grandfather said that this 'Assistant-san' was an average macho, but... thinking about it, that had to be because his own awareness was also unfixed, of course."

"Not even I thought of that question until yesterday..."

Searching for the self:

with my viewpoint as that of 'Assistant-san', just where exactly would I go?

I could not even imagine.

"What are you going to do, miss doctor?"

"...I have a feeling he's not there, but I can't do anything but trying to go around the village. If he's not there then I have to go look outside, too. You?"

"I am thinking of going to the woods."

Given how I had a feeling that that place was the most suspicious.



When I arrived in the Kamado Woods (I had named them), I found that things were a little different than they had been until then.

Three ladies were surrounding that kamado and talking.

They were all young ladies.

That was all I could determine. At present I held not the vaguest conviction about their looks.

This was odd, correct?

I could have observed them in the present sense, still for some reason I could not determine what sort of people these were.

They were indistinct women whose contours were unfixed—

The kamado was emitting a stream of smoke, so it looked like they for some reason had lit the fire in it and were looking at how things were going.

"...excuse me?"

"Dear me, welcome." "Good day." "A pleasant day to you."

".....hellooo..."

I greeted them like I was just passing past them on the street, but, still...

For now, I added myself to the circle.

"We were just looking at how the kamado was doing."

"Huh..."

I see, the kamado was actually functional, so of course if one put the pot in the steel plate inside, it was possible to use the excess heat to bake things, that was the model this was.

"There seems to be no problem in regulating the heat of the flame, so using this we can make quite a few things, you know?"

One of them concluded that, and another one *paf* slapped her hands together and said this.

"If only we had ingredients we could make sweets here."

"The problem is how to procure them."

I was in the mood of listening right from their sides the conversation between these three witches living in the forest.

"...uhm, girls? Is it safe to make sweets in a place like this?"

The gazes of the three gathered on me.

"You may say that, but you actually do get this, do you?" "This is an event that human minds cannot grasp." "We are merely unable to conclude that, but in truth there are not four people here, there is only o—"

"Stop! Stooop!"

I had a feeling that that should not be uttered.

"Where is 'Assistant-san'?"

The three made faces like they had swallowed bitterbugs. This was not a nice topic for them, I would say. One of them gave an excuse while chewing on her words by twisting her lips.

"...after all... the fairies... they said they wanted to have sweets, so..."

"Are there fairies around?"

The three as one pointed at one spot.

What the three were indicating was a single tree. Probably inferring that they had been pointed out, from behind it, stomp-stomp-stomp, the fairies advanced on a platoon scale with even a loud sound of shoes.

"Trooops! Halt!"

At the command of the leader fairy, they all came to a stop.

"Trooops! Round Up!"

They all transformed into balls.

"Coochie coochie coo."

I tickled the leader, and unable to stand it he changed back into the form of a person.

"aYeh!"

"So it is true, you people are involved in this?"

"I really can't explain it in a few words but... we want to have sweets."

"So you can, can you."

Punishment was being poked and prodded.

"Ahhh! nMuuuh!"

"In short you organized this, yes?"

It was a wide question, directed not just at the fairies but also at the three girls. The reply was given me in turns like in a relay race.

"There are lots of sweets."

"Mh-hm," I went.

"I was searching for a person, but when I spaced out over here... they pleaded me for that."

"Mh-hm."

"We had a kamado."

"Mh-hm."

"My search for that person had now exhausted any and all means, so I felt that I wanted to take a break."

"Mh-hm."

"We also prepared a lot of staff, see?"

"A human staff?"

"Yes indeed."

"And without knowing any of that, we ended up coming here."

"Mh-hm."

"This here is our game!"

"...I see."

Just when I thought what a strange place this was it, as predictable, existed in the same space-time as the fairies. I felt exhausted.

Still... it was weird.

"I feel like maybe I have come here many times..."

"You might've!"

"But I do not remember what I have done here at all, why?"

Right.

I could tell that the whole of today as a day was vague. It being the work of the fairies could explain it.

Still... when I looked back at the sequence of events, I had a feeling like an especially strong curtain had fallen on this location. There was something there that was an exception.

"Maybe, maybe, the experiences I had at this fairy village were forgotten when I left for the outside?"

"Guess so?"

"Come now, guilty party... you are the guilty party..."

My strength failed, and I sat down hard on the spot.

Right. These people, too, did not remember what they had done. They were a race that did not look back on their past.

"But let me say just one more thing."

"Aye."

"...reflect on what you have done at times... I am begging you."

"My secretary will be proactively investigating the matter."

You did not have a secretary.

"Ahhh, riiight!," the fairy said, seemingly having recalled something. "This place, you can't remember it!"

"Exactly, so why did you just..."

"That's because this place, it's been cut off from the past!"

He blurted that out calmly.

".....excuse me?"

I think my eyes became dots.

"The possibilities are infinite, see?"

"I-, infinite...?"

"Same as with the future?"

"That is why I have come here many times... what if that was the case?"

"Whenever it becomes the past, paf!," and like he thought that explanation alone was insufficient, the fairy searched for more words. "To say it easy... it's a nice space?"

"A nice... space..."

Nice in regards to what, I wondered. I felt that I did not want to think overmuch about it.

If it was 'nice' about being approximate with physics or time or quantum fluctuation or time paradoxes or all sorts of universal laws then the people who lived seriously for education might get angry, riiight. If Grandfather were here he would find it interesting, riiight. Now how about this all, riiight. Regardless, men who are nice to everybody must be watched out for, right, ufufu hohoh (synapses currently undergoing crossing).

"Ingredients, we got them you know?"

"I see. Could you prepare these ingredients and also the other tools, please? Also, I would like about another hundred people to help."

Next to me as I was making harsh conversation and taking on the role of leader, the fairies, forming rows in an imposing display of soldiership, and the three girls continued a lively discussion.

"Wait!"

For some reason I rudely spoke out and inserted myself into their conversation.

"I said a hundred people, you see? How are you going to arrange for that? Have them sitting on the ceiling of the storage room?"

A request for explanation that lacked in sense (that was because I was panicking).

"It seems there are many fairies starving for sweets. Those alone are several thousands."

"And so, since you are saying that, they are really going to bring in over a hundred people, you see?"

Worse, those hundred people would be—

"Master human!"

As I was excited, the fairies essentially bucket-brigaded this one item, carrying it to me.

"You can also have this!"

It was a banana.

"....."

And so it came.

Again a banana, a mere fruit, came to stand in my way.

It was like the three girls and the fairies had become accomplices in this precise instant of time, as they had the same faces.

They made archaic smiles that seemed artificial, wordlessly pressuring me to eat the suspicious banana.

"Ngggh...!"

I could not go against peer pressure!

I promptly ate the whole banana.

That said, this time I held the peel firmly in my hand, being careful so that it would never fall beneath my feet.

"That's the new model!"

"Do bananas have new and old models?"

"You'll slip right away after eating this one, you know?"

"Huh? ...eeek?!"

I took a tumble on the spot.

I had not even walked a single step!

Worse, the banana peel, the peel I thought was in my hand, had of course entangled with my toes.

Dear silly me, I slipped once again.



".....!"

When you are about to stumble inside of a dream, the body jolts upwards, you know.

That was what had just happened to me.

Despite doing nothing more than standing stock still in the street, I felt my heart pounding hard like when I slipped and fell, and my limbs felt still startled.

"Was I sleeping while walking?"

That banana... no, that was silly.

Did I have something like dizziness from standing up too fast, I wonder?

At any rate, militarily overpowered by an ancient chariot just when I was about to skip out on the job, I decided that this time I would seriously head for my objective.

As one approached the Village the path also changed to be paved in stone, and people passing by also increased in number.

The houses standing in rows were not uniform, either.

The townscape was vividly painted pink, green, and blue, but what made me feel a harmony such that it had to have been designed that way from the start were the long years of acclimatization I had spent. They breathed with a vitality that ruins did not have, and made even a heavily indoor person like me feel a sensation close to relief.

On reaching the main street, with the depth of color of the road as background, we had older men with chairs outside their house taking naps and ladies exchanging pleasant conversations as examples of the people that could be seen living comfortably.

The impression was that the Village whole had become a large pub.

Now then, The Lamb and Olive should be the house-shop with their front in the round plaza ahead of here.

In the distant past it was a tavern, I heard, and when bazaars or the likes were held, it was often made use of in the same way as at those times. When it was not, the hanging sign engraved with a lamb and an olive was easy to tell, and often used as meeting place.

And that was why I had come, but... there he was.

In front of the building, right below the sign. A boy of small build wearing a Hawaiian shirt.

"Is that right? Is that 'Assistant-san'? Feels like he is not..."

Even setting aside how I was on the tall side, he was fully child-sized. At his hips dangled a gun belt straight out of a western movie, on his back carefully hung a ten-gallon hat.

I would not have gone so far as to say he had to wear a white robe, but he was like some brat, was he not.

He was like that one wild child...

"A wild child?"

It felt like there was something there that caught me, it felt like there was not.



Now that I said it, the words 'wild child' were used with the nuance of 'mischievous child', but... it also meant a child who had not lived in a human environment for a long time since childhood.

Having received no appropriate instruction, he could not use words, his emotions were diluted, his ways of eating were inhuman-like, all that amounting to words that implied a fairly serious meaning. They ought not be used lightly, indeed.

Besides, there was the possibility too that that boy was not 'Assistant-san'.

But being a child meant that talking to him was comfortable, and that was a good thing.

"Hello, are you Assistant-san?"

"I so am."

I did without too much seriousness and I struck hoooOOOOOOME?!

"An' that means, yer my predecessor at the Office of Mediation?"

"...more than predecessor, I would come to be your junior..."

"Oh, you're my kouhai! That's so nice! I just got a subordinate out of nowhere!"

The boy leaped upwards, grabbed the sign (amazing jumping skills), and expressed his joy by clapping with his feet. A perfect monkey.

"A kouhai is not your subordinate."

"Yahoo!"

Really energetic, was he... he was not listening to me even a tiny bit.

His eyes were of course shining brightly, he felt *invincible!* at this point, did he not.

...this tired me.

"Let's get straight to duties, it's all going well!"

The people of the Village saw the boy and giggled.

This was embarrassing...

But the person himself acted like nothing was happening.

"Whupsy."

The boy who had become an overland person observed me without reservations, his gaze going to the top and to the bottom. There was no nasty feeling like I was being licked down, so it appeared there was no trace of ulterior motive, but...

"Huuh-huh. Not bad, I guess. Watcha wearin' and yer hair are sorta disheveled, I guess. If you wanna drag my attention you gotta expose more skin, or you lose. Chest, too, not like you don't got any, so it's way a waste. You gotta expose them more like *boom*, with total three-d feel, like, *milady here would like to reproduce*♪, that's the least you should be saying."

"Nmgh!"

"Just call me Doc, alright girl."

"...according to the criminal code of the past, there is a possibility that the way you express disdain for people's physical features would fall under harassment, which means you have failed to learn from the boss monkey at the top of the monkey hills in zoo enclosures..."

"Bweeeh, I'm like super hungry!"

The boy suddenly sat cross-legged on the spot, opened a package he had in hand, and began vigorously eating some fried fish and chips.

"..."

He lived to his own pace to marvelous extents, did he, this person here.

"I really love'em oily, that said."

Master Accursed Brat finished eating really fast, and this time of all things he extracted two

apples from the ten-gallon hat he hung from his neck.

"Wanna do it, girl?"

"...t-, thank you very much."

The boy rubbed his against his Hawaiian shirt, and bit into it just like that.

The apple had a strong aroma and looked delicious. There was no sin in apples. If so, I maybe should not be eating it and make some apple pie later instead...

"Right, Ringo Kid's fine, I guess. What'd you think? Ringo is 'apple' translated to Japanese."

"Excuse me?"

"That's my SuperName! Me, I'm guessing a Doc Holliday feeling's better, but as name Ringo Kid's in better taste, right?"

"...is this a western movie? SuperName?"

I really did not want to know much in the way of details, however.

"Yessah! Westerns're awesome! Watch'em! You'll get wet!"

"Get wet...?"

"Meaning it'll make you wanna reproduce, that's what!"

The boy's hand talon-grabbed my chest.

"....."

I c-, could not respond for a moment, you know?

"...you tou-, tou-, touched me... right there... tou-, tou-...?"

"Not bad, I guess. Nah, decent? These are sorta... treasures?"

"I am going to sue you."

"Ringo Kid might sound kinda intellectual, but that's just putting on airs, I'm more like a bad person, see?"

"Like I care!"

"A SuperName is sorta like a middle name or a pen name, it shows in a more Super way the core of the awesomeness I am, it's the soul's own Soul Name, 's what."

It was going off the rails! (The conversation.) It was going off the rails! (The conversation.)

"...oh, just, whatever."

"Yer not in a good mood, I see. How come? It's like yer tired!"

"I am tired, and it is all your fault..."

"?"

The boy kept biting into the apple, enjoying its taste very much, tossing even its core into his mouth, shredding it to pieces with the crunching of an excavator. He had eaten even the seeds.

...for some reason I felt my belly very much full.

"That was good! An apple a day keeps the doctor away."

He grinned, then stood up.

"Sigh... right."

Look at you, all boasts when you had a lady doctor following after you, I muttered to myself.

"Me, I may look bad but I go to school *lots*, though when it got out that I reproduced with some alluring teacher lady I was told *go away, go away*, and when I told 'em back that I didn't wanna, they gave me this really weird exam."

"Repro...! E-, exactly how old are you?"

"I'm thirteen."

"....."

Dadadada can't form words.

"So, I took this exam and it was like easy, and I could graduate with that. Skipping grades,

ain't I? It kinda feels I totally didn't learn enough, but since there ain't nothing I can do 'bout it, I decided to go to the actual worksite. There were other schools that would've accepted me, right, but me, I was ready for the practical part."

"....."

"'s far as looks, see, I'm just average and not some genius, right? But well, since being chased out of there, I still wanted to go along with that skipping grades stuff. Still, graduating uni in these years means you're the greatest genius in the history of geniuses, don't it? I also got waaay tired of that education these days. There's just not enough brats like me in there, you see? It was like I was being made to carry some hyuge signboard, right, but when I did it made my heart beat like hard and my expectations fly instead."

"How come?"

I could only think that he was the wrong animal from the wrong planet.

At the very least I could definitely assert we were not of the same genes.

"That was a situation that would have made me grow neurotic, however..."

"An' so, I'm gonna really bat it out of the park with being a Mediator. I'm gonna bury myself into the ruins, blast stuff with my gun, get chased by giant boulders, do a Tarzan with the vines, save a blond-ee girl from some heretical ceremony held surrounded by incense, it's all gonna be right. Say, you, got any experiences like that?"

"...if I did I would have quit!"

"Right-o. Sorta disappointing, that. Wish there was some of that hot-blooded Romance of Men. Well, ain't any helping it. I'll be in yer care, girl."

The boy leaped at my neck, pushing his lips to my cheeks from the side.

I have kept both hands on guard on my cheeks since then as I walked back on the road towards the office.

If the boy stayed behind me there would be too much danger that he would pinch my posterior as casually as he breathed, so I was dragging him away with him going in front.

The illustrious person himself had his hands behind his neck and was whistling or something while enjoying the mountain foot known for its natural beauty.



"Say, you, ever seen a fairy?"

"....."

"Me I still haven't, yannow. I wanna see one already! 'far as species they're humanity, right? And us're former humanity, then? But I just can't feel any of that stuff there is real. Feels like the protagonist of this world's still humanity. Humans're awesome, yannow? Well, watch a western movie and you'll know. They kill anyone they want to kill. I really think that yeah, war's closer to our real nature an' all that."

"...right."

Neither sarcasm nor ignoring worked, it did nothing but wash off of him. I could just about respond curtly to him, making my displeasure heard.

As long as I led this boy – Ringo or Doc or Billy or Wyatt or whatever to the office, that will mean the completion of my duty. The rest I had decided to toss at my Grandfather. Utterly decided.

"By the way, right, if humans didn't have the skills to make dentures or cook food, they'd be creatures that in the natural world would die at thirty at best. Inevitably. 'Cause they can't eat hard stuff."

"What?"

"Only using way 'mazing technologies they can live to a hundred. Ain't that ridiculous?"

"...and?"

"Reproducing is yeah, stuff that you do as soon as you're able to. On this Earth, that is. Animals too do it within the year that their mating season comes. Too, doin' it as early 's you can or it'll be bad. Ain't nature strict?"

"...and that is why you did obscenities with a teacher?"

"Us here, I'm taking living to the extreme. That's why I got lots of interest in reproduction and child making and child rearing. In other words, I got a hands-on approach to things. Get that?"

"...I truly do not get it."

"So. Well, guess it's fine. Yer the type who's got stuff to tell to someone my type, but for now it'd be a bit late to think after having had an experience..... say, how come that dog's been following me for the last while?"

The boy's gaze stopped on his back, vigilantly thinning his eyes.

"A dog?"

A rather unappealing dog was following us at a location about ten meters behind.

"...it appears that the same breed of dog is multiplying in this village, is it not."

"Like I know? I's just got here, I dunno."

"It cannot be that it is the same dog laying in wait for me, of course..."

That dog felt somewhat human... correction, he did not feel like a dog and made me uneasy.

"It's really got style, this thing here!"

The boy took my hand and stared at around my wrist.

"Ah, uhm...?!"

"This watch here's a sundial, ain't it!"

"Ahhh, you mean this... practical usability is zero, however. It just serves no purpose, this silly thing..."

I without a reason just kept that thing on, you see.

"Don't want it? Then will you give it here?"

"Ah, come now... jeez... I will only lend it, all right?"

The boy forcibly plucked off the wrist sundial.

"OK Corral! Hah hah, this I gotta say hello to!"

"You will make for a thick-skinned and competent scholar."

"Does it fit me? Well?"

Having promptly worn it, he repeatedly hopped up and down, expressing his joy.

"It seems so... it does fit you, and perhaps better than it does me."

"It's awesome, this anachronistic feel. It's perfect for me. Girl, you got style when it comes to giving boys presents. Nyse, niiice, woman! Maybe I'm falling in love, can I fall in love?"

".....oh."

He was too outspoken... I could not reply...

What was it? Falling for me? Seriously, uttering that all calmly...

"You... do have... any awareness... of anything...?"

I could not put it properly into words.

"Awareness? I do. I got my own awareness. I'm gonna show it to you too eventually, girl!"

"Y-, you do not need to show it to me... what do you think you are going to do..."

"Tsk, you're way too nervous. I'm just honest towards my appetites, you see."

"...I wish boys would treat being boys with much more care..."

"Why you really, ain't you just dreaming too much?"

...well, I do tend to do that, I must say.

Being told the same by someone did make me feel dejected all the more, however.

"Bof, just get used to it and that's all, ain't that right? With someone on the low side of a man but that you can talk to easily like me at your side, it's all ease. Well? Ain't that nice!"

"...I am not accustomed to these things in the slightest, however, not at all."

At The School, more or less... with the very youngest boys, then...

"I think kids and men are different."

"Ngh..."

"Well, I'm in your care, lady."

He overfamiliarly stroked my back.

"...uhm... could you stop it... with touching my behind...?"

I could understand that men like these did exist, but... I would have never thought that the rumored Assistant-san would be this type, what a shock.

"Huh? But..."

What passed past my brain was a frail young boy, squatting on the ground with both hands seized—

A doctor lady facing me and talking—

My own self, wandering about endlessly, searching for someone—

"Well now?"

More than recorded in the brain, it was like they were stored as physical sensations... they were memories that came with a feeling on the skin. Were they dream or illusion, they would not have this sense of realism...

I scrutinized the boy's face.

That squatting 'Assistant-san', did he actually have this face?

"Fallen in love yet?"

"...I have not fallen in love."

"Playing with fire?"

"...I would extinguish it!"

Now I just did not care anymore. Sigh.

"First, let us go to the office..."

"Oh, what a hottie!"

The boy sharp-sightedly noticed a glamorous beauty passing past the two of us. If he had just noticed her it would be one thing, but he also called to her, you see. The pretty lady gave him a smile that had a giggle to it.

...well, I guess she was happy, right.

Though he noticed the beauty, the boy was also unmindful of how my feelings were close to lighting my face on fire, stepping backwards in order to approach the lady.

"Why you...!"

The pretty lady and the boy had come to a halt and were discussing something with amusement.

Overwhelmed by that immodest mood, my feet came to be nailed to that spot.

As I was faltering, the beauty and the boy concluded their conversation.

"A'ight, girl! I'm gonna get a bit of a tour of the village, so!"

"What did you say?"

"Do whatever you need to do back at the office! See ya!"

The two intimately went arm in arm and walked away.

I could not make the slightest motion.

It was an event that surpassed understanding.

"...hitting on girls... while on the job..."

Was that normal behavior, was I a late bloomer, was the boy too proactive?

"T-, that is correct, indeed..." I understood that like a lightning bolt. "He is the inhabitant of a different star."

Like that could ever be.

We were equally human, except our interpersonal faculties were different unto death, that was all this was.

I decided to chase after him. If I did not take him at least temporarily to the office whatever else, I would also be in trouble. And I had just barely found 'Assistant-san', but—

A dog passed past me,

"Bow wow!"

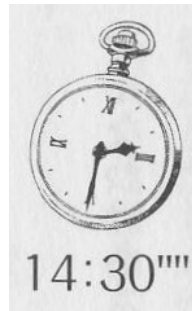
and my consciousness suddenly inclined.

Alongside that vertigo I was familiar with, I was grabbed by the nape of my neck and tugged backwards. With strong force. An extraordinary energy like I had been grasped by a mechanism made me 'spin backwards'. The pretty lady and the boy became smaller and smaller as I looked until they were a dot.

The whole scene was stretched, everything my eyes could see was elongated, time and space contradicted, and,

"Bow!"

The dog barked—



Now what was going on?

"....."

I did not believe there was anything to be hesitant about. I was searching for 'Assistant-san'. I did have a feeling like he had been at my side until a moment earlier, but that had to be a misapprehension, of course.

After all, the time today was,

"...ah, right."

The watch that should have been at my wrist was not there anymore.

It had gone missing.

How did I lose it, I wonder... it did feel like it had broken, but I also believed that it was taken.

Treading on the stone pavement, I put my fingers to the rough wall, walking alongside it.

'Assistant-san'... now what sort of person was Assistant-san?

A vague unease still remained to me, but I hoped this flickering consciousness would settle down very soon. I had a craving for that which neared the physical level.

"First..."

By the outline, he was a boy.

His features well arranged, he was slightly childlike.

He seemed the calm sort. He had the serene intelligence of a young wise man.

Gentlemanly, nice, mindful, the roughness of someone of the opposite sex hard to feel, a restrained demeanor.

So, the Hawaiian shirt suited him—

"Why Hawaiian?"

The choice of that item was much too surprising.

"A ten-gallon hat? A gun belt?"

As I thought about Assistant-san, rascal-like sides of him came to me one after another.

Worse, the images were fairly intense, firm enough from start to end that there was no opening for illusions about anything from their tactile feel to their design.

A Hawaiian shirt?

A ten-gallon hat?

A gunman?

I shook my head. These all too vivid images conversely smelled false.

First of all, that type I cannot quite...

"Still."

It was like, I did not dislike it as much as I thought...?

".....!"



I set both my hands against the wall, linking the five fingers as they were sliding towards the ground in order to stop them. If I did not, I felt like my knees would vanish from beneath me. An unidentifiable embarrassment made my face flush hot.

"Ngggh... just... what is this..."

I was so concerned about Assistant-san that my delusions grew way too vivid... or so I decided that I was convincing myself about.

Today was a day in which everything was strange.

The village the road the woods and I, all equally so.

The flow of these phenomenons was similar to the flow of a water current, though it was possible to go against it to some extent, in the end the stronger force would wash you down a pre-decided route. No doubt.

And so it was not that mysterious a physical experience even how I, temporarily lost in indulging myself in dazed pensiveness, found my feet heading towards the Kamado Woods.

That said, no sooner than I got into the woods my befuddled head was shaken hard. That was because something preposterous was happening.

There were lots of them.

There were lots and lots! (Half-crying.)

Through what theory was at present unknown, however it was only in these Kamado Woods that "we" could manage to coexist.

If that was correct, then I could just faintly perceive it.

The woods were a special place.

This time I would meet five or six of those girls, my resolve I believed had been made about that.

Regardless, and however, I did not think there would be several dozens there!

Those several dozen women sharp-eyedly spotted me, had a glance at their wrists with the exact same timing, made a smile with only the edges of their lips hanging upwards, and talked to me.

"Dear me, a pleasant day to you." "Welcome." "At around what hour did you come here?"

"This has gotten even noisier." "What type of sweets are you skilled with? Ah, but is not everybody the same, I wonder?" "Until what hour have you managed to make it?"

Many and varied shocking experiences had brought me to this treatment.

Even someone like I would come to seriously wish to throw everything away and go *ahahaha hoh hoh hoh*.

Every possible time period that was no longer the past was, at this point, no longer time but merely place, I thought.

That too was a territory hard to tolerate, just, enough with these absurdities already!

It was being overwritten. It was a dreamlike place, so the brain nearly failed to remain there.

Whatever else might happen, paradoxes would not occur.

And so it was that a hundred of extremely similar women could be together, and it was proven that there was nothing special about it. After all, we could not acknowledge them as anything but similar women, there was no way to be certain.

The number of people itself was unclear.

Maybe fifty, maybe a hundred, I could not even tell that.

Perhaps I could count them, but that would only fail and the act would be impossible.

We were being controlled by rules of that sort, I expected.

Happily, there did not seem to be any me who was sixty years old, so I could console myself with the knowledge that this mystery was going to be solved within a short time.

...but it was tiresome.

"So, where exactly is all of this going?"

The strong scents of essence of vanilla and cinnamon coming from every which where made my head dizzy.

In a certain sense, this was a heretical ceremony held under the swirling of incense, was it not. Something I would definitely want to be saved from, however...

"It is because we happen to be so many." "It is because we could get our hands on a lot of ingredients." "And the kamado's thermal capacity is just right." "So we wanted to try making something that would take effort." "We even have people to serve them to." "And a chance like this seldom comes."

These women with a really similar impression to each other uniformly agreed as they uttered reasons tinged with the excuse. Many similar voices overlapped, and my head, which was already about to split, felt like it was turning into grains of powder.

"And just because of that, you all want to make cakes during an emergency like this?"

Exactly.

Around the kamado it was Western Confectionery Hell.

As prepared by who knows who, there was a mountain of ingredients and tools, and besides the kamado there was an oven, a steam heater, an iron board, a safelike cooler box, any possible necessary tools were all there. The woods had by then assumed the aspect of an outdoors kitchen. On top of that, there was a display case for setting out the finished sweets and table sets of a variety of sizes with tea sets.

Why various sizes?

"...what are this miniature table and tea cups for?"

With the human-sized tables occupying one corner, I saw a miniature table café being prepared for opening. It reminded me of a cartoon where the mother turtle carries her turtle youngs on her back.

"Ahhh, those are, well..."

"They're ours!"

That did not even require an explanation.

The fairies that clambered instantly on the tables were in numbers beyond count.

"Is the café not open yet?" "Hurry up!" "I'm sick of waiting!" "The vanilla essence makes me so impatient!" "I just can't wait, huh!" "The nice scent really makes the mood, right?"

"Oh dear dear dear..."

A preposterous number of fairies shivering as they all as one itched to eat sweets was a grand spectacle.

"This is the perfect chance... for them to play the legendary Game of Café, then."

I as well, as someone whose hobby was making sweets, I did feel the charm of a café.

To have a café of my design, with tables and chairs chosen by me, fashionable cloth and quality teacups, though the game was won or lost on the variety of drinks, so of course there would have to be not just common black tea but also herb tea, fruit tea, Chinese tea, Japanese tea... sigh, that would be so very creative.

Of course, in the present world that was a dream never to come true.

"That looks fun."

Even with fairies as customers, being able to play café would be a marvelous way to spend an afternoon.

Awww, jeez...

"...I want to do something, too."

"Please, go ahead."

Bowl, rolling pin, colander, measuring spoon, spatula, a complete set of all these tools was handed to me.

*Chase the lost Mr. Assistant!*

...the already strained will to do that had long since scattered in all directions, and I could easily switch my consciousness over to doing this.

"Waaah, the humans increased again!" "Why so! Good! At! Flights! From! Reality! You are!"

"Are there going to be tons of sweet in the near future?" "There is no near future here, though!" "But my predictions are full of cakes?" "I've been waiting for so long!" "Sweet and tasty and delicious, right?"

"Ahhh, yes yes... we can make anything, at this point, can we?"

With these many people here, I, as a late starter, wanted to enter the contest with an odd entry, indeed.

Having always the same idea was out of the question, how embarrassing. It would be an inability to listen to the ambiance.

"I truly wish to avoid producing something generic... so what do I do now, hm?"

I tried stealing glances from the sides at what the others were working on, but since as expectable these women prided themselves only in a complete lack of sociability, they were unfairly hiding what they had close to their hands as they made their preliminary arrangements.

S-, so fussy...

That was how I looked when seen from the sides, then. I had to be careful.

Making everything overt would have helped to prevent us having the same ideas.

"Well, it is fine anyway."

If I go with something original, creative, and made for me, I should be able in due course to make something that people could not.

Something only I could do—

Seeking it I made my gaze run around, and oh dear oh my in this place there were bananas, one two three... mmmh, I could not even count them.

"No one is using them... excuse me, mister fairy going over there, I would have a question."

And with that I seized him and dangled him.

"AwwwHn, this is bullying this is bullying!"

"Do you dislike it?"

"...I like it?"

Sooo like children indeed.

"I am not bullying you, I have a question. Do you like being asked questions?"

"I can't believe I would be asked one!"

"An unexpected assertion..."

How mysterious these creatures were...

"It is about these bananas, is it fine if I use them? Do you like chocobananas and the likes?"

"A chocobanana!"

There was something remarkable in the fairy's response.

"What is it?"

"...awww, if, back then, we only had had one chocobanana..." He had a tinge of anguish.

"H-, how would that have changed?"

"We would have licked off just the chocolate?"

"I was not asking how you would eat it. That is not the subject of this discussion."

I shook him side by side.

"Hyyh, ahhHnh!"

"I will say it plainly. A banana, please."

"That's all right!"

"These are not weird bananas, right? My instinct, which is nearly a pro with regards to bad things happening to me, is beeping quite a little bit, however."

"Beep beep beep!" Reception. Next, reply. "Relax!"

"...really?"

"The version right before this was immediately tasty, but it had a bug where it flung you really far away."

"Did it, now?"

"Maybe it did, maybe it didn't."

"It did... far away, where to?"

"Who knows!"

The fairy slipped down from my hand.

Like that he made a self-blooper hit, flung himself on top of the table, and lost himself in the crowd somewhere.

"Ah... jeez."

Not using bananas when I finally had some was a waste. Just accepting the fairy's guarantee was dangerous, but it looked all right so, on this occasion, I shall be borrowing them.

### **How to Make a Banana Spring Roll**

1, peel the banana and remove the fiber strings, crush at the bottom of the bowl.

2, mix cinnamon / granulated sugar / crushed walnuts.

3, pour all your love (□ point).

4, pack an appropriate amount as the skin of the spring roll.

5, fry with heated oil until nice and crispy.

6, done! (you can leave them like they are, they're also good when cool. Add chocolate to taste.)

"If I do not crush the banana but wrap it as it is, then a different texture will come out."

"Huuuh."

And with that, it was done.

Yes, why if it was not a nice accomplishment.

"Is that a banana confectionery?"

A woman that I felt like I had seen somewhere was peeking in.

"You cannot look!"

I hid my things by covering them with my upper body.

"What a fussy person..."

"....."

That description from before got bounced back at me with the exact same purity, which made me groan a little.

"Your household was poor, so the lunch you brought to school was a sandwich with only bread. But since you did not want my classmates to see you came to want to hide yourself when you ate, is that your thing?"

...shut that mouth.

And while we were doing this and that, cakes and other baked sweets were cooked one after

another, the scent emanating from them doing nothing but increasing in density. Hot cakes, spat out of the oven like they were selling literally like them, had the crowd decorating them, slicing them up, sorting them out, and then that Western confectionery was used to fill the plates on the tables.

The fairies were drooling like they had forgotten to turn off a faucet.

"C-, can we eat? We can, right? I heard a rumor that we can?"

"Eating halfway through making them is absolutely Unacceptable."

"Ngh!"

Conversations like that were being exchanged here and there.

"Yes, this will do well, I say."

Every table I looked at had plenty of western sweets, and the line of my intentionally mismatched spring rolls had... no real sense of presence.

"...at a glance they are quite plain, indeed..."

There was no contest between cakes and spring rolls... huh.

"Then it is about time we eat."

Someone said that, and a cart with teapots by the dozen was carried in.

"Eeek!" "Ahhh!" "Piii!" "Ngggh!"

The fairies were so happy that they fainted and went incontinent and fell from the table, it was really serious.

"Have we served your favorite sweets to all of you? Then... let us eat."

""Thank you for the food!""

It was the beginning of a tea party.

As it was predictable that the fairies would get wild, a buffet style was sought with regards to the sweets.

The fairies had no reservations with the tea, and flooded it with cakes and cookies and pies and puddings and sherbets.

"Hyyyh!" "aGhhh!" "Ghyuuuhn!" "aHyyyh!"

They should be cheers of joy, however they sounded like screams of agony.

There was a large number of fairies, but there was an even greater number of sweets. As it was not an amount that could be conserved they had to be eaten within the day, but seeing their vigorous appetite, it did not seem that that would be a concern.

The group of humans had a relaxed mood, taking only a few sweets and enjoying the tea.

"Delicious, what was this?"

"A Japanese sweet known as mitarashi-dango, skewered rice dumplings in a sweet soy glaze."

"First time I had them... I did know the recipe, however."

"...indeed."

"The Japanese green tea goes down without needing to mix it with anything, does it."

"This is sweet. It might have gone better with some coffee."

"How about that cinnamon stick?"

"Thank you, I will have that."

"This sugar cube has a tiny flower engraved on it. How cute."

"I tried putting some jam and a yet different taste—"

"Now that you say that, Grandfather likes to munch on sugar cubes when drinking sake—"

Goodness gracious, what a market we made.

Left unattended, some talk about Assistant-san showed up, but I did not quite get in the mood

to participate to the conversation. When was I ever going to find him, I kept thinking, and the related mood of ennui would not release me.

Conversely, the other people seemed carefree to the point of strangeness. They had none of them, no worries, then. Or maybe they had already solved them all?

As I was sipping tea without words, I decided to probe things a little.

"By the way, people, I happen to be searching for someone."

The girls all stopped their conversations on the dot and looked at me.

And then once more lowered their gazes to their wrists, going yup-yup with tiny bobs of their heads like they had found something that only convinced them.

"...you were searching for Assistant-san, correct?"

They spoke that out quite shamelessly.

Well, let us match them.

"Indeed, that I was. As you are aware."

"Oh dear."

The women looked at each other in the face and made a high pitched giggle. Ngh... so frustrating.

"...do you think I will be able to find him?"

I repressed my irritation and came out with a question.

"I am sure that you will find him quickly."

"That is true, you will not be made to wait."

"Once you return from the wrong place you went to, he will be right there."

"Just one final push to go."

"But please rest easy. Once everything ends, a fun tea party awaits."

"Even the things you find melancholic, once you try to finish them, you will find they were nothing particularly difficult."

"It will be all too disappointingly simple in the end."

"Be nice if you could find Assistant-san, I say."

"....."

Being told those things in a way that implied they were one step ahead made me feel ill at ease, like I was being made fun of. I could not retaliate at all, I could not.

One thing I did think of.

"Girls, what kind of person do you think Assistant-san is?"

The women looked at each other.

Ah, these people, none of them were wearing wrist watches—

Was there no one who was wearing a watch?

...there were. One, two... three of them... no more than a number countable.

Those girls had faces like they did not understand where they were, and were sipping tea like old ladies.

The only people who seemed to be calm with their feelings were the ones who were not wearing watches.

"I know I am asking a question in return, but what type of person would you prefer him to be?"

"Me, you mean? Well, I do not know... yet."

"If you knew it would not be a quiz, correct? This is about hopes, this is, hopes."

My hopes.

"...I will not ask for much, at this point."

"Height?" Someone asked me.

"Unimportant. But I am sure... he was short, right."

"Looks?" Again a different one.

"On the thin side, I would say. Hard pass on the macho."

"Personality?"

"If possible nice..." I started to say, but I changed my mind. "As long as it remains there, any personality is fine... so long as he has a self that can live without being forgotten by people... then even if he is more or less wild, or even debauched."

"Clothes?"

"....."

For just this one question, something did pass past my heart.

"Hawaiian shirt...?"

No, that cannot be – I also had a strong feeling that said that. I was contradictory.

I felt a countless number of gazes. They were not making fun of me, nor scorning me, theirs were calm stares.

One of them, right next to me, said this as representative.

"Us too, we are of the same opinion."

Promptly different voices came, these ones bursting with a gentle smile.

"But you cannot lie to instinct!" "Gentle." "Quiet." "Obedient." "Courteous." "Smelling like sunlight through the trees." "Soft and fluffy chestnut." "But for some reason." "With a showy shirt." "Reliable." "Certain." "But at times." "Bold?"

The women burst out with excitement.

The only ones who did not go along with them were I and the group small in number with wristwatches.

"...b-, bold, in what sense?"

With the rest assumed fine, that was the one thing that reeeally bothered me.

After I asked, the woman representative said "here" and offered me a plate with tea sweets.

"T-, thank you," I casually picked one of the selected teacakes and carried it to my mouth.

That it was a banana spring roll I only noticed after swallowing, which was my carelessness.

"Your field of vision has expanded just a little bit from before."

Her voice was changing partway through to become more and more tinged with adulthood.

Once hidden by a vagueness filter, the girls' contours suddenly became distinct.

"...what, no way...?"

Sitting right next to me was an elegant-looking old lady. She still held in hand the plate she had offered me. But was this person not about the same age as I until a moment ago?

The other people too had various ages.

She was my age, she was a little older, she was a lot older–

It was likely that the more than one hundred people gathered here did not necessarily come from nearby "places".

As I took all their smiles as one, I... slipped.

–so even application of heat had no effect...

I watched the banana peel cross my sights with quite the sour feelings.

## **A pre-decided event**

In the vast grazing land between the office and the Village there remained the majority of a stone wall from ancient times.

For the sheep it was a merciless wall, for humans it was just the right height to sit upon, so shepherds often came on here when having their lunches.

On top of that stone wall there was one fairy, waiting all alone.

"Master human, this is our thanks!"

"Thanks?"

"We ate until we were full!"

Fairies ate sweets.

And I... supplied the fairies with plenty of sweets. I will continue doing so even going forwards, of course.

That was because it was much more fun to treat others to sweets rather than eating them myself.

Today as well I had delivered that golden bottle to them...

"Ahhh, it is thanks for that, then."

"Do you like bananas?"

"Indeed, I do like them. It is quite rare to have a fresh one, however."

"I present you our latest model!"

"...huh?"

I found it difficult to grasp his meaning, still one way or another the fairy was graciously handing me a banana.

"And that, well, thank you very much?"

"It's the latest model, you know?"

"W-, what sort of thing is this?"

If it was too strange I would have a problem, do understand...

"It doesn't slip anymore."

"So, it does not slip... that is a good thing, indeed."

"Also, it will actually return you to how you were, you see? Super OK!"

"???"

The meaning of all that was utterly unclear.

"You can eat it at any time."

Did the banana not have a best-before date?

"Well then, see you!"

The fairy cast himself into the grasslands and vanished.

"...just what."

And as I was puzzled,

"Heeey! What're you doing there!"

Grandfather's angry voice made me stiffen, and I clumsily fell on my behind.

"OwChCh... G-, Grandfather?"

The ancient war chariot my Grandfather was riding parked right before me.

"You not going to pick him up?"

"I went many times!"

Those words smoothly leaving my mouth made me surprised.

Well now? Did I actually go?

"...you can't go multiple times."

"Can I indeed..."

We tilted our heads in puzzlement.



"...go pick him up right now. You're late, so he'll definitely be uncomfortable."

"I have lost my watch, I cannot tell the time."

"Mh? You lost even the wrist sundial?"

"Yes, at some point when I was not paying attention."

Grandfather made a grim face as he groaned.

"...I see, well it wasn't that precious, so..."

Ah, there was a teensy bit of a feeling of regret there. How come?

"Or rather, I could never determine the time accurately. Not with that thing."

"I'll eventually make up something for that. First, just go right away. He's a bit of a difficult child, but you're close in years so I think maybe you'll be able to understand each other..."

"For whatever reason, I am extremely tired..."

And that was the truth.

I felt a tiredness like I had spent the whole day rushing about.

"...gotcha. Then I'll let you ride the Merkava. Sorry, but could you give 'er the place?"

The old man who was riding the chariot with Grandfather, a likely friend, gave me his space, and I very nervously rode on.

"If we had a composite bow there, you could equip it and be just like the archers of that period."

"I would not, I would absolutely not."

Besides, there were no enemies.

The chariot began moving. It was a vehicle of fairly intense motions.

Every time the wheel passed on a pebble a tremendous impact reached all the way to my posterior. More like, this was the worst possible thing to ride!

"Ah!, ouchCh, ow!, ow... eeek!"

"Woah, Deimos-kun, woah!"

Grandfather and I were riding in a chariot from the outskirts of the village, headed for the appointed place.

"Lots of dogs, I see."

"...so it seems."

We could see dogs of the same species here and there.

There were dogs sitting on the edge of the street, doing nothing in particular.

There were dogs sleeping on top of roofs.

There were several dogs clustered together and sleeping.

"D-, does this not feel like a city of dogs?"

"Mh-hm... were there really that many dogs here?"

At a glance, nearly half of the villagers were dogs.

A life with a dog...

With a dog-like dog that rarely if ever moved, that did not become a hindrance for daily life, an extremely calm one, however.

"Whatever, let's go to the meeting place."

"Yessir."

Under the wizened signboard decorated with a lamb and an olive there were a lady in a white labcoat and a boy low in stature and holding a dog, waiting side by side.

There was a burly boy all alone a bit of a distance away, but he looked like he had nothing to do with this.

"Oh, there he is."

Grandfather pointed at the boy.

He was a boy scarcely flush and scarce in luck.

Slender limbs, smooth flowing hair, listless eyes.

A boy like his own self was not yet determined, like he was teetering on the edge of his ego, and that left... a funky Hawaiian short which nearly did not suit him.

"...mh?"

"I talked about this a little, but he lost his guardians when he was young. As he didn't know any words, he was pretty much living in an inconvenient environment. That's the cause, I suspect... can't put this better, but he's a boy with a little bit of transparency to him. In short, he doesn't quite have a sense of presence, so..."

Grandfather was making pained efforts to explain, this I understood implicitly.

It was clear that the boy was fragile and his profile vague.

"This isn't me pushing it on you, mind, but go talk to him a little. He needs that sort of environment."

He had a serious sense of transparency, one which made me feel we would pass by each other without crossing even if we did meet.

"But Grandfather."

"What?"

"The boy is smiling."

Contrary to Grandfather's explanation, I could even see a quiet intelligence dwelling in the eyes of the boy as he gently smiled.

"Is he? Hummm... having someone like you say that, when you hate people, well. I'll introduce you, how about that. I don't think he'll respond much, so please be understanding and know that he's like that."

"No need, I will try to speak to him myself."

"Ah, 'oi?"

I knew nothing about him.

I should know nothing about him, yet I had this arrogant mind to me.

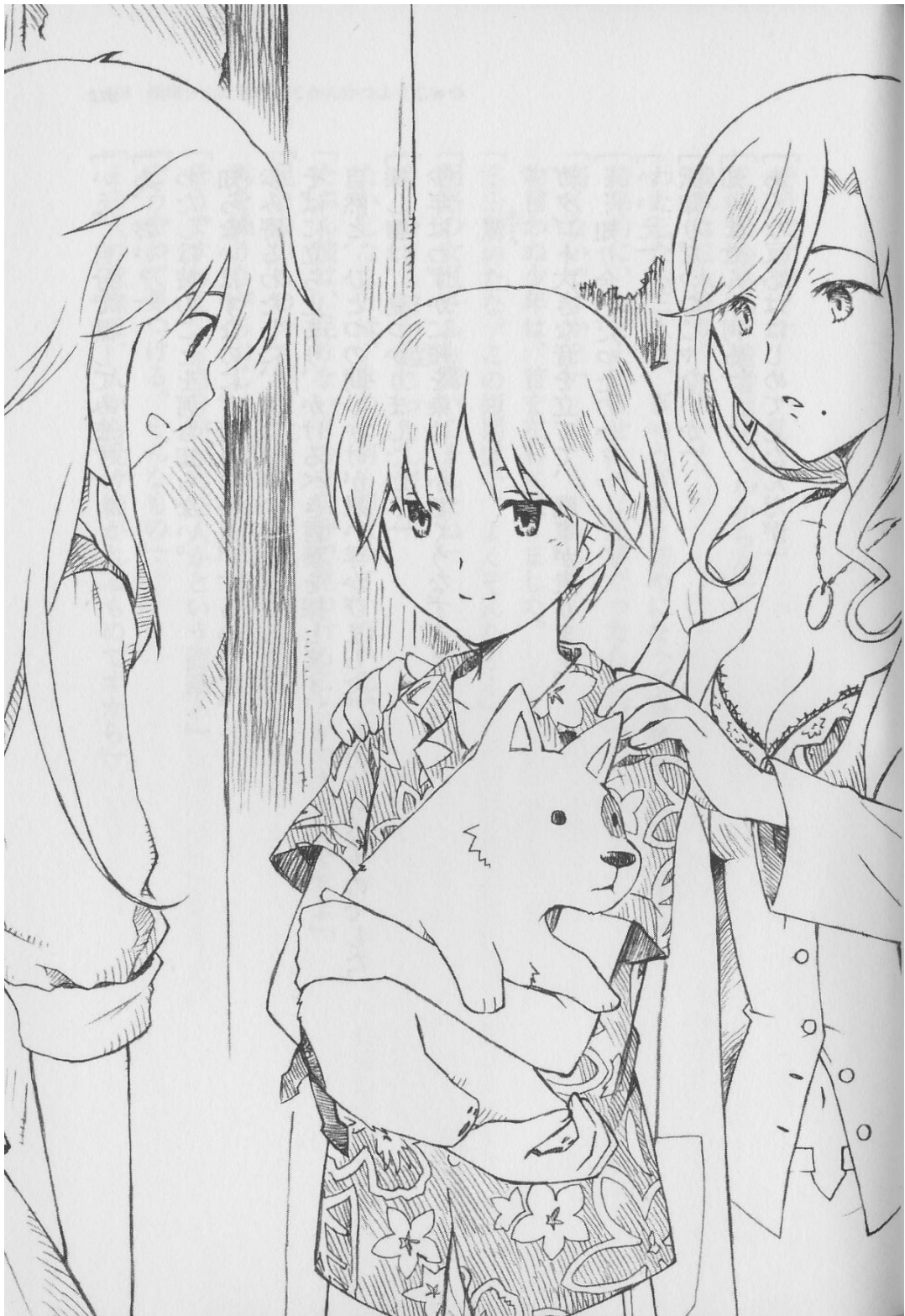
He seemed to notice me as I walked closer.

I came to a halt at his side, searching for words to address him with.

Spontaneously, a single question came to my mind. It was this.

"Have you found what you were looking for?"

The boy's cheeks flushed slightly and he gave a tiny nod.



The chariot made loud thumping sounds as it ran.

"...so you knew him?"

"I did not."

"Well aren't you knowledgeable about the affairs of the heart, then."

"I am not knowledgeable, not at all."

"But it was the first time I saw him react like that."

"Was it?"

"...I don't get you. You youngsters... I don't get you."

The chariot was for two riders.

Us three were packed really tight as we headed to the Office.

"In conclusion, it seems that leaving it to you was the right choice."

"Does it not hurt?"

The boy who spoke nothing shook his head side by side.

"...that's surprising, that there. In a period this brief he really got..."

"The doctor lady in charge of him was also surprised."

"Hummm... has something happened?"

I was certain that nothing in particular had happened.

"Perhaps he was able to find by himself what he lacked."

"Lacked, like what."

Grandfather asked me that as he drove the horse.

"Let us see now... the awareness of what sort of person he was?"

"And how do you find something like that."

"...a person's awareness is bestowed upon oneself by others."

"He had no parents, you know?"

"And without a little bit of a trick, it seems it would have been impossible for him to supplement that lack."

As we spoke, I vaguely understood where he was heading towards.

"A trick?"

"Just an example, but... gathering up... all the rumors related to him, for one."

"What's that about. What possible reason would there be for things to come to that?"

I was bad at explaining this, certainly, but Grandfather had become strong-headed, and our conversation did not quite mesh together.

"A reason... right."

If there was a reason, then, right... because, compared to far in the past, this world had become far kinder, had it not... that was one Marchen-like idea that I depicted in my mind.

I am sure that that was the world of the fairies, was it not?

I glanced at the boy's face from the side, and although he could not understand it, I could tell that he was frantically straining his ears to hear the conversation between me and Grandfather.

Perhaps he, unable to define himself, had fallen in the break between existence and nonexistence.

A rare bug in a magnanimous world.

To supplement a diluted sense of self, picking up basic concepts about him was indispensable. And so—

"I am wondering whether the fairies were involved in this."

"Them? I don't think they were involved much..."

"Maybe he had encountered the fairies. Before being put into custody."

"...mh-hm."

Right, if there was anything mysterious, it was the fairies.

An explanation easy to understand, I would say.

However, piecing together his own self in that situation was done by his will.

Most importantly, the place swelling with rumors about Assistant-san, the territory that snatched away consciousness, was that preposterous tea party—

"...that tea party?"

"What is it?"

"Have I just said, 'tea party'?"

"You did."

"...well now?"

Grandfather snorted.

"Spacing out, are we."

"...some memories are not as certain as their possessor believes they are."

"Hoh, a pet theory of yours?"

"To the point that having whatever had been forcibly snatched away from me returned to me as a present makes it all the more beautiful!"

Grandfather made a puzzled face.

"...what're you talking about?"

"The office has been cleaned a little, and this will be your seat, Assistant-san."

"..."

With a little nod, Assistant-san sat in the chair given him.

Still with a dog in his arms.

"So you took that dog with you."

"He does not even bark, is it not all right?"

"That's one weird dog, that there. That's a face that's only pretending not to know what's going on..."

The dogs themselves were at present still a mystery.

Did they have anything to do with that sequence of events?

Well, they suddenly integrated into our lifestyles just today.

"What's up with that dog, I wonder."

There was no person capable of answering that question.

I was wordlessly about to slump my shoulders when,

"...time paradogs."

A thin voice was emitted from Assistant-san's tiny lips.

The office grew silent.

""He spoke.""

Grandfather's voice and mine harmonized perfectly.

"Well well well, this is to celebrate. Nice one, boy."

"I have the feeling that the spelling is wrong (Time Paradox ≠ Time Paradogs), but what is the point of that anyway?," went I.

"Dogs kept being created as the debt of the universe to counterbalance each time paradox, what do you think of that?"

The old man was enjoying this all on his own.

"What do I think, what do I think of what?"

"I just thought about this universal romantic notion that, every time someone took a time trip, that colossal contradiction took the shape of a dog so it could be ignored..."

I absolutely could not understand what this person older than me was saying.

"...oi."

"Well, I hope we get along well."

Ignoring Grandfather, I offered a hand to Assistant-san.

"..."

His hands was so soft it was like he had just been born.

Days later.

We discovered that, right outside the office, someone had planted a perennial plant of the Japanese fiber banana family. It was truly inexplicable.

"No way it can grow in this climate and this soil. It's gonna rot."

So went Grandfather's worry, but ignoring it, the perennial banana plant grew quickly, reaching a height of several meters. In three days.



"Absurd, absurd!"

Even the central stalk, which in the beginning was not noticeable, grew in the blink of an eye and carried with it a bunch of its fruit. They were all round and fat and had an alluring color, and I, who particularly loved this fruit, had big expectations from it.

Once it had borne fruit, they were always mature, and despite having no seeds, no matter how much we harvested, the next day it had completely restored itself.

"..."

Around here, Grandfather accepted reality and lost his words.

A perennial plant of the Japanese banana variety... well, a banana was a banana, though.

I took Assistant-san with and harvested it.

"Thank you for the food."

And like that, the two of us helped ourselves to some.

"Assistant-san, by the way, after we have our bananas there is something I want us to promise."

"...?"

"And that is for you to always slip and fall."

Bob-bob. Assistant-san agreed.

"If we keep that promise, then we can eat these rare bananas as much as we like, you see."

Mh-hm-mh-hm. Assistant-san agreed.

"...it is just like that, so, well, do not worry."

Assistant-san and I had been escorted to that place by fate, and decided to make magnificent slips.

We neither had injuries nor did we faint, our consciousness continued uninterrupted, and I laid supine in that garden near the office.

"I see, returning to how I was, without deviations, Super OK... it was this."

I checked upon Assistant-san by just twisting my neck, and found he had gotten up first and was setting up a sign with the name of the plant right before the banana tree. He was a hard worker.

".....mh."

With the blank signboard before him, he hesitated just a little, then wrote this.

*Time banana    Warning, when eaten you will slip!*

### **Fairy Memo - Measuring Spoon**

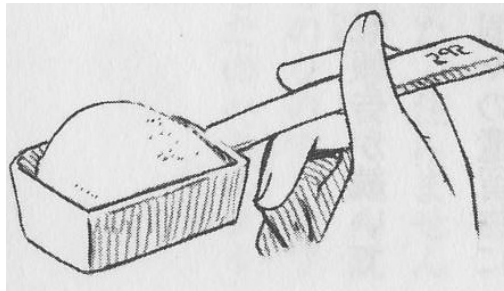
This is one of the tools made by the fairies.

It looks like a normal measuring spoon, but it has the power to turn intelligence into fine powder.

Eating the powder makes intelligence return to how it was, but continuing to use it without doing that makes one's head gradually worse, and as a conclusion one can no longer understand the world correctly. It is very much recommended not to use it. It's very dangerous!

Also, as it possesses the power to indicate the current intelligence with a number, it is also very much recommended not to evoke negative feelings such as jealousy or envy.

If there was a choice, it would have been better if the spoon had turned excess fat into powder, indeed!





## Periodic Report - May

### 1. First half

The Autonomous Ward of Kusunoki Village responded to a petition from the population, carrying out a recovery of the fairies' bequested items, which had been previously and repeatedly reported as being sighted in the village and its surroundings.

According to the inspection by the employee that followed, it has been established that among the recovered items, two hundred and seventeen were fairy bequests. An investigation began from extensive viewpoints including judging each individual bequest's effect and danger level, as well as means of influx.

As followed, a spoon-shaped bequest (see figure I) was found to possess an extremely high level of danger, to the point that the employee in charge incurred harm to her intellectual faculties, and the omen of a so-called Fairy-tale Level Disaster was visible. Regarding the matter itself, also thanks to the heroic volunteering of the employee in charge, the spread of the disaster was restrained.

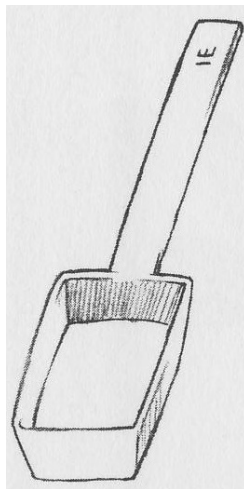


Figure I: spoon-shaped bequest

Strictly speaking, the relevant employee's intellectual faculties cannot be said to be at their fullest, and as an aftereffect an unforeseeable lowering of intelligence remains at a serious level.

Furthermore, regarding the natural disaster due to the mountain fire that happened in the same period, there are questions regarding whether it was partially a man-made event, but that was really a natural disaster, it was not my fault. You people even went out of your ways to send me letters so I was told to report on that, but I think that is quite the difficult thing, all right?

Regarding the powers of the spoon-shaped bequest, I would like to refer to the accompanying sheet, which includes an investigation report. Now, as at present the danger of the item has been made clear, the employee in charge has carried out disposal via sealing in a bottle, but for some reason it got lost. I searched for it, but I could not find it. How it vanished from the

bottle was something like a sealed-room murder mystery, and as an environmental assessment was indispensable for the solution to this, using the person on duty as scapegoat would just not be very nice.

Also, there came to sojourn ermines in the village, about which I am sojour. No, they did sojourn. Sojour has the meaning of being sorry by the jour which is French for day and so it means I am sorry, I believe, but I am confused, I believe, so to be accurate I sojourn here. Ermines are violent creatures, so I directed the village to feed them as to avoid them attacking chickens or the like. I also entrust the hamsters living under the floor to you all. For now, they are just ermines (see figure II).

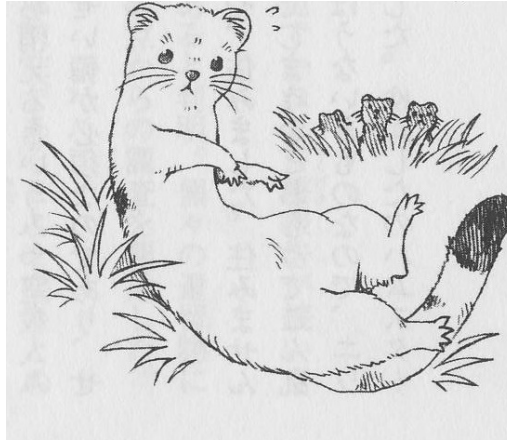


Figure II

I am aware that the report is becoming something truly awful, but I would like you all to think that if I did not become this frantic, then nothing would come of it. Also, in order to improve this situation I believe that the United Nations should promptly provide me with a marvelous Butterfly Net Set.

## 2. Second half

Nothing in particular to report.

Also, one employee who had been absent due to disease has been reinstated.

The colleague had been previously receiving cures for his interpersonal contact disability, and his participation to the Office of Mediation was an aspect of that medical treatment.

However, that being said the colleague's recover was remarkable, and at present he is able to deal with the designated work without problems.

The means through which he has achieved this recovery are unknown.

One theory rumors that the fairies participated to this, and the colleague also witnesses that he had experienced interaction with said fairies.

Investigating the truth is important, however as it is also thought that that recovery had its main cause in an entirely personal mental image, a discussion has been carried out with a doctor affiliated with the medical association, and in order to avoid infringement of privacy, at present it has been decided that there will be only follow-up observation.

With the addition of an excellent staff member, it ought be expected that from here onwards

there will be great improvements in the support of the territory.

**Afterword.** There's little space so going without a carriage return<sup>1</sup>. We got the second volume out. Thank you very much. This time the original story was a little too long. With the increase of pages the price also goes up. The first volume being around 600 yen but the second volume being some 700 yen would be bad, wouldn't it. I can't but have an interest in earning money, but overdoing it is bad, and because of that, I discussed things with His Lordship, the Person In Charge. I've put under review all sorts of Dark Techniques (Evil Knowledge), you see. For example, sneakily making a hundred and seventeen line spot into an eighteen line one, or increasing the number of characters per line, all little villains that attracted my attention, but in the end I chose the straightforward work of decreasing the number of carriage returns in order to gain in number of lines. Just like this afterword, see. However, the time for that work was not included in my schedule, so my life promptly became hell, specifically and for the first time in a long while it became an ever pleasant Giudecca (fourth circle of Hell). Sleeping only once every two days, for example, that sort of things. I was undertaking several jobs, that's what I was. But finishing a job at around seven AM and having a meeting three hours later at ten AM made me of course see the shores of the Other Side. I naturally had no time to sleep. In the train I was making high-risk-like whispers of *impossible, impossible*, and to rebuke this weak self of mine a possible heavenly being (maybe an archangel) descended and mind attacked me by whispering *possible, possible* at my ears. Heaven's a PITA. Also, the shores of the Other Side have stones and stuff piled on them. Dear readers, I have done my best and have been able to contain the price, so you picking it up this time as well will make me happy. As for the questionnaires and fan letters that I received, I used Memory Bread to memorize every sentence (typical Shogakukan joke). Well then, until the next occasion...

**[Editorial department - notice] First edition December 2007. Partial revision November 2011.**

*This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.*

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<sup>1</sup> This afterword originally fit in a single Light Novel page.